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Alvin M. Borden

ON THE KING'S COUCH

ON THE
KING'S COUCH

BY
OCTAVE AUBRY

PQ

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L513



TRANSLATED
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CONTENTS

PART I

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. JACQUES CASANOVA, VENETIAN . . .	9
II. THE BALL	28
III. THE HOROSCOPE	45

PART II

I. AT THE OPERA	61
II. THE HAREM FAVORITE	79
III. THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENTS . . .	97
IV. JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON, MARQUISE DE POMPADOUR	114
V. A SOCIAL CALL	140
VI. CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR	158

PART III

I. A KING'S WORD OF HONOR	179
II. THE LETTERS	194
III. AT BELLEVUE	207
IV. SARTINE'S MISSION	228
V. THE FAREWELL	239

PART ONE

ON THE KING'S COUCH

I

JACQUES CASANOVA, VENETIAN

It is the afternoon of August twenty-sixth, 1760, and a dazzling and elegant traveler has just arrived in Grenoble. L'Hotel des Trois Dauphins, with its dreary gray façade, is favored with one disdainful glance. His distaste is evident. He refuses to look at the room which he has reserved. He gesticulates, he creates a fearful disturbance, while his lackey, a great strapping rascal, sniggers behind his back. He wheels about on his high red heels, bows to the good hostess with a regal air, climbs into his chaise and is off.

He is tall and energetic, with broad shoulders and a slim waist; his complexion is swarthy, his nose aquiline, his mouth strong and very red. His movements are tremendously vivacious; there is something charming about his smile and his birdlike, rather prominent eyes; something fantastic and voluptuous. He is extravagantly dressed: a suit of gray velvet, embroidered in gold, a floating mantle of black silk, a three-cornered hat, trimmed with point d'Espagne. Huge white plumes languish over his brow, although they are altogether out of style, a profusion of jewels, chains, and watch charms; and rings on every finger. He speaks with a strong Italian accent, caressing in-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

flections, but, at times, with harsh insistence. He laughs frequently, showing his strong white teeth, and sometimes his mirth is so violent that he knocks his powdered wig askew, and rights it with a jeweled hand. Such is Jacques Casanova at the age of thirty-five; by the grace of God, Venetian, and Chevalier de Seingalt by his own good grace.

A moment later, the light carriage stops before the door of a house. The valet leaps from his seat.

"Monsieur le Baron de Valenglard?"

The baron is at home; Casanova is requested to enter. He is conducted to a room in excellent taste, with woodwork of antique oak, and a fireplace where a log is already burning. The Italian draws closer, shivering.

M. de Valenglard enters. He is an officer of the Dauphiny Regiment, middle-aged, short, fat, and simple, but with a very good-natured manner.

"Monsieur," says Casanova, "pray forgive the liberty I have taken in presenting myself to you: I am the Chevalier de Seingalt. . . . Here is a letter from my incomparable friend, Madame la Marquise d'Urfé, recommending me to your good graces."

His host bows, holds out his hand, and begs his visitor to be seated. Then he reads the letter which is covered with the massive handwriting of Madame d'Urfé, formerly his mistress.

"*Parbleu*, Chevalier," he says courteously, when he has finished. "Our dear friend, I am delighted the Marquise recommended you to me. It is a long time since I have seen her. How is she?"

JACQUES CASANOVA, VENETIAN

"In the best of health, I imagine. When I left her last year, in Paris, she was getting younger every day."

"Still wrapped up in magic?"

Casanova laughs. "Yes, indeed. But Baron, I warn you, I am interested in astrology and cabala myself; ever since I was a young boy, I have been absorbed in the occult science."

"Splendid! It is a fascinating subject. I had dreams of becoming an adept myself, but how could I, in this city, and considering my profession? My dear Chevalier, I am delighted to make your acquaintance. Consider me, from now on, your very humble servant. I insist on being your host in Grenoble. Where are you stopping? With me, I trust."

"A thousand thanks, Baron; you overwhelm me. But I would surely be imposing on you. Besides"—he winks rapidly—"my manner of living is very free. . . . I could scarcely impose my habits on you. I will only ask you to recommend a convenient lodging place where I will be able to receive you and entertain you at supper. I have been told that the ladies of Grenoble are as amiable as they are lovely. I intend to lead a joyous life during the week that I will be here."

"Bravo, Chevalier, that is easily done . . . I know a splendid place for you to stay," adds M. de Valenglard, rubbing his forehead, "But it is at La Tronche, outside the city, half a league from here."

"No matter. I have my carriage."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Let us go there immediately, then, unless you have some better plan."

"I could not possibly have a better plan than to be with you."

The chaise rolls over the uneven cobblestones, through the narrow streets of the Alpine city. And Casanova, who gesticulates a bit too much, gives complacent accounts of his more recent adventures. He has just come from Ferney where he spent several days in close intimacy with M. de Voltaire, and from Chambéry, where he seduced a young nun. By some miracle of nature, she was the exact counterpart in every charming feature, of the intoxicating, the divine M. M., the nun of Murano, whom he had loved so passionately.

They leave the city gates, and the countryside spreads out before them, divided by the Isère, flowing between its tall poplars. The hills are terraced in steep slopes, covered with ripening vines. This whole land is one vast garden. The Belledonne range, bathed in sunshine, rears its pointed walls close by, and each snowdrift sparkles like a diamond.

In a few moments they reach the house. It is spacious and pleasant, built on a slight rise and surrounded by a park.

"The caretaker is famous for his cooking," says Valenglard, climbing out of the carriage. "If you will allow him to prepare your dinner and your supper, I am sure he will provide you with lodgings besides."

JACQUES CASANOVA, VENETIAN

Casanova receives this economical suggestion with a smile.

"I would never permit it."

"My dear Chevalier, he will fleece you enough as it is. The house is for sale; he pays no rent. But let us go in."

The caretaker greets his distinguished visitors with a low bow. He shows them an apartment containing three rooms. It is lofty and airy, and has just been freshly painted.

"It is not very luxurious," says Casanova. "There is no bathroom. . . ."

Valenglard is overcome. Such pretensions are unknown in Grenoble. The caretaker is already brimming with respect for the magnificent stranger.

"However, the drawing-room is quite passable, and I will be able to manage very well. My valet, Le Duc, will bring up the luggage. I will turn the rogue over to you. And you, my good fellow, must give us supper every evening. M. de Valenglard has praised your talents to me. He will be my guest very often. See that everything is worthy of him. I had rather be robbed than live in a niggardly fashion. Do you understand?"

"Monsieur," says the delighted caretaker, "I would stake my reputation that you will be satisfied."

On the way out, Valenglard and Casanova pass three young persons, very neat and prepossessing, who make low curtsies.

"My daughters and my niece, Messieurs; all three at your service."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Hm!" says the Chevalier. "Beware of Le Duc. An old fox who gobbles up little chickens."

"I will take care, my lord."

Casanova tosses a golden louis into each girl's apron. They can scarcely believe their eyes. Here are princely airs indeed. Even Valenglard scarcely conceals his amazement.

"My dear Casanova," he says, when they are once more seated in the carriage, "I am afraid that this stay will cost you dear. Those girls are not novices, and the father is an old scoundrel who exploits their misbehavior."

"All the better, Baron, all the better. It will be all the more amusing. What is the use of having money if you can't enjoy it? Besides, the treasury is in excellent condition. I have thirteen hundred louis in my wallet, and a letter of credit for ten thousand pounds which I will ask you to cash . . . But no business discussions to-day! Where are you taking me now? I don't want to upset your plans."

"Fortunately I am free to-day: I am not on duty. I intended to go to the concert which is given at the Hotel de Ville every Thursday. If you would care to go with me, you would see all our most charming ladies, and I should be delighted to introduce you."

"I would be enchanted! You are a delightful cicerone. I am eternally grateful! My life and my fortune are at your disposal!"

Valenglard smiles at this exaggeration. He knows what Italians are like: they often pass through Grenoble. Casanova's exuberance does not offend

him. No doubt he is one of these Venetian noblemen, patricians for centuries, fabulously rich . . . And besides, a friend of the Marquise . . . He seems to wear his heart on his sleeve. . . .

The chaise joins a line of carriages in the Place Saint-André before the Hotel de Ville, formerly the vast and somber palace of the Constable of Lesdiguières. Valenglard and Casanova pass through the portal. On the right is the concert hall. Two hundred persons are seated there, mostly women, in their best finery. In the Provinces, one must make a brave showing.

While an excellent string ensemble plays the music of Rameau and Gluck, the Venetian's gaze wanders over the assembled company. Among all these indifferent and uninteresting faces, one only arouses the connoisseur's approval. A young girl dressed in a simple gray gown, but with a wonderfully beautiful face, is seated two rows away. She turns around, and as chance would have it, their eyes meet. The Chevalier hastily appraises her charms in more detail. Almost immediately, she modestly lowers her brown eyelashes. During the rest of the concert she never looks around.

"Who is that exquisite child?" Casanova asks the Baron, in a low voice. "She is beautiful enough to cause a turmoil in Paradise. I would like very much to know her. . . ."

"You have excellent taste," whispered his guide. "That is Mademoiselle Roman-Couppier, the prettiest maiden in Grenoble. Although she is poor, she is un-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

fortunately very well behaved. She is an orphan and lives with her aunt. She sees absolutely no one."

"Three reasons which increase my curiosity."

"It would be a complete waste of time."

"Can one ever be sure?"

"Her aunt, Madame Morin, is right beside her. As we go out, I will accost them."

Casanova, who was never very fond of music, consigns Gluck to all the devils on this occasion. He wriggles impatiently, and turns and twists his gold-headed ebony cane. . . . Finally, the last selection is over. Valenglard, with his arm linked through the Chevalier's, maneuvers in the crowd. He greets Madame and her niece.

"Mesdames, how is your health? Did you enjoy the concert? . . . Permit me to present my friend, M. de Casanova, a Venetian nobleman."

A nod and a light flutter from the two women. Mademoiselle Roman's expression is serious. Madame Morin smiles, flattered. She is a good bourgeoisie, round-faced, lively and talkative. She has already passed the prime of life, but still retains some traces of beauty.

"If the ladies would be so gracious as to accept the use of my carriage, I would be both honored and delighted," says Casanova, after a low bow in the Italian manner.

Madame Morin is coy.

"Monsieur is too kind. It is just a step to our house."

Nevertheless, she is tempted. A great many of her

JACQUES CASANOVA, VENETIAN

acquaintances are watching her. Valenglard moves in Grenoble's loftiest social circles and his friend has such a princely air. She relents.

Casanova assists them into his chaise, which is fashioned after a new style and delicately upholstered in blue velvet. He surrounds them with every possible attention. Then he gives the coachman his orders.

"We will accompany you to your door, madame," says Valenglard, "to help you to descend, and to say good evening."

"Your kindness overwhelms me," says the bourgeoisie. "But you must not leave us so soon. We have prepared a little supper: pray come and share it with us. My husband will be very pleased."

The Baron would have refused had he been alone, but Casanova presses his arm; he acquiesces. They stride along through a labyrinth of muddy alleys behind the Hotel de Ville, till they reach Rue Saint-Ange, where Madame Morin lives.

"You will find very poor fare, Chevalier: you who are so accustomed to luxury and high living. But you brought it upon yourself. . . ."

"I have had a taste of every kind of life, my dear friend. I have known the magnificence of the Italian courts, but I have also known the squalor of the Leads, where the Inquisition had me imprisoned for impiety. In order to enjoy my present grandeur, I have decided to suffer a great deal if necessary. One of the ancients, Cicero or Seneca,

ON THE KING'S COUCH

I no longer remember which, said: 'Pleasure is not complete without a background of pain. . . .'

"Don't expect me to tell you which one it was," says the officer modestly. "At the academy I was distinctly a mediocre student."

"And I, by Heaven, was distinctly not!" cries Casanova, brandishing his cane. "I have a degree in *utroque jure* from the University of Padua. But only the devil could say what good it has done me!"

The company gathered in the Morins' small room has just finished supping at the round oaken table by the inadequate light of two torches. The Baron was right; the fare is very poor: soup, a fowl, a ragout of veal, some very ordinary pastry. But the wine is not bad. Casanova is particularly delighted with a delicious ratafia, and asks for the recipe, declaring that it is better than the Turkish visnat which he tasted seventeen years ago at the home of his friend Yousouf-Ali, in Constantinople. Monsieur Morin is there; a lawyer, all dressed in black. He is small and slight, and seems decidedly averse to entertaining these gallant gentlemen. It is not on account of his daughter Marie, who is too young and insignificant. He is no doubt thinking of his niece. That Italian sitting next to her seems very enterprising.

All the time that he is talking and laughing, Casanova is watching his charming neighbor. Love, for him, is an ingenious art, and he looks at her with the minute attentiveness of a distinguished amateur. Anne Roman is the most magnificent creature that

JACQUES CASANOVA, VENETIAN

the Venetian has seen in twenty years of travels and adventures.

She is tall and perfectly proportioned; her modest corsage sets off a slender waist, and suggests the generous charms of a Venus. Her arms are dimpled, her hands slim and quite white. Above all, there is her marvelous, her dazzling face. She wears her thick black hair unpowdered, and her fine, pale skin is often animated with blushes. Her features are as regular as those of a statue. But the statue is alive; the nostrils of that classic nose quiver sensitively, that cupid's-bow mouth opens, and shows the pearly teeth. And the eyes, eyes that belong to Spain or the Orient rather than to France, dark eyes flecked with gold; their liquid gleam is soft and completely human and presages delight.

Casanova is aroused, and while he is turning over countless projects in his mind, he is trying to put these good people on the wrong scent. So, to please her parents, he praises the charms of the tender Marie.

"What a pretty child! I can scarcely believe that she is only twelve. It seems hardly possible."

Madame Morin beams, and gets up to look in her desk for the ledger where she has inscribed the year, the month, the day, and even the minute of her daughter's birth.

Casanova marvels at her exactitude.

"Everything that is necessary for casting her horoscope is here. Has it already been done?"

"No, Chevalier, I would have been delighted, but my husband would have scolded me."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"How now, Master Morin, are you so religious?" asks Valenglard.

"It has nothing to do with religion," answers the lawyer uncertainly. "But I do not believe in the occult sciences. According to my way of thinking, astrology is the most suspicious of all. I tried it a long time ago, like a great many other people; but as the years have made me wiser, I concern myself only with mathematics these days."

Valenglard protests. Astrology and alchemy have always attracted him.

At first Casanova says nothing. He is absorbed in other matters. Several times his leg has brushed Anne's skirt. At first she draws back, but then she grows afraid of attracting attention, and is forced to submit. The Venetian profits by this. His hand furtively caresses her soft knee. He does not dare let his hand wander, but he does not withdraw it; he lets it rest on that knee, whose firm polished contour can be felt through her dress.

"As a matter of fact, there are two kinds of astrologers," he finally remarks, lest his silence appear peculiar. "There are charlatans and men of science. During the course of my travels, I have met several admirable men, the last to share in the secrets of Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus, and I was favored with sublime discourse. I was already acquainted with the principles of astrology, but with my imperfect knowledge, I applied them badly. My understanding has become purified through contact with these great geniuses. I have grasped the mo-

JACQUES CASANOVA, VENETIAN

tivating reasons.. I have seen the light. Yes, Mesdames, you must believe me; as surely as there is a God, the stars exercise a mysterious and powerful influence over us. Our thoughts, our characters, our destinies, are determined at birth by the position of the planets, at the precise hour when we first saw the light of day. But the calculations necessitated by a research of this kind are so complicated, errors slip in so easily, that it is not astonishing that many adepts have been mistaken in their predictions. Malignant and envious people immediately raise a hue and cry about fraud and imposture. They forget—or rather they attempt to ignore—the marvelous results, the astounding prophecies, which have left landmarks along the path of human progress, and pierced the veil of destiny from the days of Julius Cæsar to the time of Louis XIV. Charlatan, they called Nostradamus. And from century to century, with an amazing exactitude, his prophecies continue to predict accurately great events, wars, disasters, and the rise and fall of kings. Among the blindly groping generations of men, whose eyes are covered with a film, there are a few enlightened beings who walk in a straight path, their eyes raised to the heavens. They alone see the truth. Do not attack them, and attempt to force them down to the common level, the level of ignorance and fear. . . .”

Casanova speaks rapidly, in a slightly jerky voice, but with such lively effusion, such enthusiasm, that he forces the interest and sympathy of his audience. He seems giddy with his own brilliance. His fea-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

tures, in the dim light, become finer. His eyes glow like topazes. The lawyer, astonished, no longer smiles. Madame Morin listens open-mouthed. Valenglard evinces his approval by august nods. Anne scarcely breathes, and her heart beats more strongly.

When the Venetian has finished, silence descends upon the company and for a few moments no one finds words to break it. Finally Monsieur Morin excuses himself, after a polite phrase or two, as he is obliged to go out on business. Everybody is relieved by his departure, and Anne, who is no longer embarrassed by his glance, is emboldened to ask the question which has been poised on her lips.

"And so, Monsieur, you know how to cast horoscopes?"

"Certainly, Mademoiselle, and I would be delighted to determine yours, if Madame, your aunt, permits."

Madame Morin nods her head in assent. This Italian nobleman is such a fine man! He seems so rich, he is so graceful. How can she help assenting to his gallant advances? Besides, she loves her niece, and would be unwilling to deprive her of an innocent pleasure. And then she is curious. . . .

It is growing late. The good-natured bourgeoisie proposes quadrille to bring the evening to a close. It is an old-fashioned card-game, but it is still much esteemed at Grenoble. Casanova is acquainted with it. He plays all sorts of games with a rather disturbing competence. The adversaries draw up their chairs, the score is hotly contested, and the time passes agreeably. Madame Morin is very animated;

she enlivens the party with her piquant remarks. Anne has a sweet, even disposition, a level, judicious mind; not brilliant perhaps, but deliciously natural. Casanova, who is purposely losing, lets the ladies win a few pistoles. They sympathize with his bad luck.

Valenglard makes a sign to his friend. They must go; it is getting late. The Chevalier does not hide his regret at leaving such pleasant company.

"Thanks to you, Mesdames, I have spent one of the most enjoyable evenings of my life," he says, kissing Madame Morin's hand. "But I expect to be in Grenoble for a whole week. I would like to entertain some of the people of the town at supper and dancing the day after to-morrow. Will you honor me by being present with Monsieur Morin and these charming young ladies? If you are unable to come, I would prefer to give up the idea of having an entertainment which your absence would deprive of all its *éclat*."

Madame Morin is delighted, and accepts. Then with a torch in her hand, she precedes her visitors through the dark corridor which leads to the door. She is in front with Valenglard; Anne follows with Casanova. Suddenly he feels his charmer slip a piece of paper into his hand.

A rendezvous, he thinks. He is exultant, and in his joy he kisses the lovely neck which gleams in the darkness beside him. Anne resists a little. After a swift glance at her aunt who is chatting with Valenglard, Casanova seizes the beautiful Anne in his arms, softly presses her to his breast, and profiting by her

ON THE KING'S COUCH

emotion, kisses her on the mouth. She shivers, bewildered, half swooning. The Chevalier supports her with a sturdy arm.

She has scarcely recovered when Madame Morin turns around.

"Are you able to see, Monsieur le Chevalier?" asks the good woman. "There are two steps down. These old houses are very inconvenient."

They part with many friendly farewells. Casanova reminds them of his ball.

"I will come for you at six o'clock," says the Baron.

"Oh, Monsieur de Valenglard, how can I ever thank you for all your attentions?" cries Madame Morin, who is tremendously elated by the prospect of being escorted to the Venetian's ball by one of the distinguished noblemen of her city.

"By being acquiescent, Mesdames, that is what would please the Baron most," says Casanova gayly.

And his malicious eyes twinkle.

Madame Morin, standing on the doorstep with her arm about her niece, pretends to blush.

"Shall we finish the night together, my amiable friend?" proposes the Venetian. "Come to my lodgings. We will drink and gamble till dawn. And if it is agreeable to you, the caretaker's daughters, who are very charming, by my troth, may divert us."

"Chevalier, pray excuse me, I must sleep. I am on duty to-morrow morning very early. You will have to amuse yourself without me."

JACQUES CASANOVA, VENETIAN

"Then come and sup with me when you leave the citadel. We will put the talents of this famous cook to the test."

"Very willingly."

"Do not, I beg of you, forget to ask all your friends to the ball."

When Valenglard is gone, Casanova caresses the note from Anne Roman which is in his pocket. He is burning to read it, but the darkness is impenetrable. What an adorable girl! How beautiful she is!

He would give all the gold in his wallet to possess her. But will it be that difficult? She did not seem averse to him. To be sure she did not return his kiss, but her senses must have been aroused since she was so disturbed. She was a novice, but she would learn. Casanova is a past master in this kind of education. Not for a moment does he doubt that he will gain possession of that ingenuous heart and that beautiful body. Anne, by Heaven, will be his most enchanting conquest. And he has long since lost count of his loves, having in his own estimation, already surpassed the "mille e tre" of Don Juan.

The chaise comes to a halt; Casanova steps out. He unfolds the note by the light of the lantern. Only one line.

"Anne, July twenty-ninth, 1737, at sixteen minutes past two of the afternoon."

The adventurer frowns. This is no tempting rendezvous. His inamorata wants him to read her horoscope . . . So be it. There will be one more link

ON THE KING'S COUCH

in the chain which is encompassing her. . . . Casanova goes into the house whistling.

His room presents a delightful appearance. A fire is burning, there is a tray of fruit and liqueurs. The alcove, with its flowered curtains, contains a huge downy bed. But the Venetian's face is downcast.

"Where is Le Duc?" he asks the caretaker, who has followed him, hat in hand.

"Monsieur, your valet supped too well. I am sorry to inform you that he is in his room at this very instant, sleeping off the effects of the wine. We put him to bed. In his present state, he would have offended the eyes of Your Honor."

"Mordieu, I will pack the knave off!"

In spite of his air of irritation, he is laughing in his sleeve. His valet is acquainted with his tastes; he knows that when there are pretty girls in their lodging, he may desert his post and leave his master to be served by softer hands than his.

Casanova makes two or three turns about.

"This room is not light enough. You will fetch me two more torches. And what is this? Candles? I am Venetian, my good fellow, and I am used to tapers!"

"You will have them to-morrow, Monsieur. If your servant had been sober, Your Honor's habits had been respected. I did my best. . . ."

"Very well, that will do for this evening. But who will assist me to bed?"

"Monsieur, my two daughters awaited your return.

JACQUES CASANOVA, VENETIAN

They are at your service for anything that you may command them to do. Shall I call them?"

"Why, certainly!"

A moment later, Rose and Manon appear. They are as pretty as a nosegay; one has black hair, the other's is chestnut; one has blue eyes, the other gray. But their mouths are alike. Casanova chucks them under the chin and asks them how old they are. Rose is eighteen, Manon is sixteen. What do they do for a living? They make gloves. Are they good girls? Yes, they answer together, laughing, and without blushing quite enough.

The Chevalier gives their father permission to retire, and sits down in an armchair with his feet on the fire-dogs. Rose takes off his boots. Manon arranges his hair and knots a huge kerchief of Chinese silk about his head. Then both complacently assist him to disrobe. Rose and Manon admire the lace on his nightshirt.

Rose wants to blow out the candles.

"Leave them," says the Chevalier. "Our eyes must have their pleasure too."

II

THE BALL

WHEN Valenglard arrived, Casanova was just completing his toilet. He was enveloped in a dressing-gown and Manon was powdering his hair. A huge paper mask protected his face.

"How now, Chevalier, you are not ready? The ladies are here. What have you been doing to-day?"

"My dear friend," said Casanova, speaking through his mask in a nasal voice, "I arose only two hours ago. You cannot imagine how fatiguing it is to lodge in the same house with two such beautiful girls.

"And one dines so well. . . . Mademoiselle Manon, your father is a superb cook. His dinner last night was exquisite.

"I hope that he will surpass himself to-day. I ordered supper for twenty, as you suggested. But I wished to preside over everything, and arrange the flowers and select the wine. That is why I am so late."

"It is an excellent excuse, and you will be freely pardoned if your ball is half as delightful as we expect."

"I am sure it will be. And besides, I am ready. Here you are, my dear. . . ."

THE BALL

He tossed off his mask with a flourish and doffed his dressing-gown. Out of the bulky folds of this chrysalis emerged a dazzling butterfly. He wore a suit of violet velvet worked in silver, his jabot was of point d'Alençon. There were diamond buttons in his sleeves, and diamond buckles on his shoes. Around his neck was the order of Saint Gregory which the pope had given him. He examined himself complacently in the mirror which Manon was holding for him.

"How do I look, Baron?" he asked with ingenuous fatuity.

Valenglard smiled with true French politeness.

"You must ask that question of the ladies, my dear fellow. What pungent perfumes! All the fragrance of an orange grove."

"An Italian custom," said Casanova. "Pray excuse me, perhaps I overdo it a bit. Open the case-ment, Manon. But come, let us go and greet the ladies. Is the lawyer with them?"

"No. He has been detained in court and will be very late, if he is able to come at all."

"Good! He will not be missed."

Casanova received Madame Morin and her niece in the most gallant manner imaginable. He solicited the honor of embracing the lovely Anne. It was not denied him. But what did that welcoming kiss amount to, in comparison with the embraces that he would have liked to give and receive? They thanked him warmly for the embroidered gloves that he had sent on the previous evening with some flowers.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

Each of the ladies was wearing a pair, and submitted them to Valenglard's admiring scrutiny.

Anne Roman had on the same gray silk dress with little stripes that she had worn before. And although she was so simply, so poorly dressed almost, she was divine. Her only jewel was a golden cross which hung around her neck on a black ribbon.

"You seem to have very comfortable lodgings, Monsieur le Chevalier," said Madame Morin. "Where are we going to dance?"

"Downstairs, Madame, in a room opening out on the garden; and we will have supper in the chamber on the right. I won't show it to you as I want to keep it a surprise. But would you like to see my bedroom, before our other guests arrive?"

They entered, and while Anne was admiring the toilet case of lacquer emblazoned with his coat of arms, Madame Morin examined the books, the jewels, and other trifles scattered on the bedside table.

Suddenly Casanova ran over to her.

"Pray, Madame, forgive my fatal oversight! Shut your eyes and do not look at this portrait!"

"It is extremely pretty," said Madame Morin, who was laughing and did not want to give it up. "But I must admit that it is very suggestive."

The miniature represented a nude woman, of great beauty, reclining luxuriously on a rug. Her pose, to be quite frank, could not have been termed modest, but it set off her charms very delightfully. It was the Venetian beauty with whom Casanova, in the days of his rash youth, had reproduced all the bizarre

imaginings of Aretino, beneath the wondering eyes of the Abbé de Bernis, French ambassador to the Serenissima Republic.

Anne Roman came over to her aunt.

"May I see it, too?"

"No, indeed, Anne. This is hardly a subject for a young girl."

And she handed the portrait to the Chevalier, who carefully shut it up in its case.

Anne puckered her crimson mouth, and her usual gayety deserted her for a moment. But when she heard the bell which heralded the arrival of the other guests, she darted over to the Venetian and said:

"And my horoscope. Monsieur, have you examined it?"

Casanova clasped her waist so gently that he was sure she could not disengage herself without seeming affected.

"Certainly," he said, "I worked on it several hours, for this kind of research necessitates great care. I cannot tell you about it yet. All I can say is that it is doubtless going to prove extraordinary, and that even now it presages a marvelous destiny."

"Really?" cried Anne. "I am so happy. Do you hear that?" she called to her aunt. And she jumped up clapping her hands.

Casanova was delighted with her naïve excitement, although he still had no idea what he would invent for her horoscope. But he saw a way of making this interesting beauty more amenable to his projects.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

The drawing-room was slowly filling with the highest society of Grenoble. Madame Morin had asked to be allowed to invite a few of her friends and Valenglard had spoken to some of his comrades, officers in the Dauphiny Regiment. Except for a few dowagers, who still wore stiff skirts and old-fashioned coiffures with true provincial fidelity, the women wore elegant gowns with huge panniers, powdered hair, and rouge and patches. Many were masked in the Italian manner. Most of them paraded superb laces and heavy jewels.

Casanova was heaped with compliments. In order to cut them short he offered his arm to Madame Morin, who gloried in his choice, and the whole company descended into the chamber where the musicians were already tuning their violins. The room was a kind of conservatory, and the Venetian, with ingenious good taste, had decorated it with tapers and flowering branches.

The Chevalier opened the ball with a lady well past her prime whom Valenglard had pointed out to him; then he danced with each of his guests in turn. But he kept the quadrilles for Anne, who gave herself up to this pleasure with childish enjoyment. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled, her nostrils quivered, she seemed like a goddess come down to earth to join in the diversions of mortals. Casanova told her so, pressing her hand gallantly. But she smiled without exactly understanding. The education girls in her position received did not include classical mythology.

THE BALL

At midnight, Le Duc, who made an imposing major-domo, announced supper. It was served in the great hall on the second floor, amidst a profusion of silver, crystal, lights and flowers. With one accord, the guests declared that the effect was most royal. All the delicacies possible at that season and in that part of the country appeared one by one.

The chef had performed miracles. Almost all the company were rich or well-to-do, but the abundance and the rarity of the viands astounded them, as they were all more or less accustomed to a quiet and even shabby manner of living. There were twenty-eight entrées. The finest preserves and vintage wines followed the venison and spiced dishes. Gigantic pastries crowned the feast, as well as the wines of Champagne, which were almost unknown in Dauphiny.

Madame Morin, seated opposite her host, was crimson and puffing, but well content to play the hostess. Not far from her was Anne, radiant with excitement; and her eyes often rested tenderly on the Chevalier.

Every one was complimenting Casanova inordinately, and begging him to spend the autumn in Grenoble. He regretted that he could not yield to their pressing demands. If he had the time, he added, he would certainly remain longer in order to make the acquaintance of a certain illustrious family which had formerly been friendly with his father.

"What family?" everybody asked.

"The family of the Marquis Bouchenu de Valbonnais."

"He was my uncle!" said one woman excitedly.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"You must come to our house to-morrow; I will introduce his children to you!"

Casanova was lying. His father was a poor actor, and the Marquis de Valbonnais would have barely allowed him to sleep in his barn. This piece of deceit was absolutely useless in a city where no one suspected his humble origins, but these fairy tales slipped out of their own accord. He loved to lie, and he knew that he lied with great dexterity. It was a part of his personality, like extravagance and gaming, adventure and pleasures of the flesh. Without his lies he would not have been Casanova.

After supper the dancing began again, gayer and more animated than ever.

It was very warm. Anne was unable to cool her brow with the fan of pierced ivory, painted with pastoral scenes and decorated with frivolous mottoes which the Chevalier had given her. She was tired of dancing. Casanova proposed a walk through the garden in the fresh air.

Seizing her by the hand, he led her to a secluded walk where the branches of the lindens formed a vault overhead. Moonlight illuminated the flower beds. Around an old well, arbor vitæ stood dark against the silvery sky. A bench was in the arbor. Casanova seated himself close to Anne.

"How pretty this ball is!" said she. "I have never seen anything like it."

"How does that happen? Don't you go to dances often?"

"Two or three times during the winter, not more.

THE BALL

You are forgetting that we are quiet people, Monsieur. Our life is dull . . . But," she added with sudden melancholy, "probably it is no gayer for any one else, aside from the luxury and glitter. At least that is what my uncle says. . . ."

"What are you saying, my dearest child? You are casting aspersions at pleasures that you cannot yet appreciate. Life is an unmitigated source of joy if you are young and in good health. You must use life gladly, and serve it with idolatry. If you know how to enjoy it, life is full of amusements, of surprises, of follies. . . ."

"Of troubles, too," she murmured.

"Of troubles, too. I know something of that. But these troubles are transient. The least ray of sunlight drives away the mobile clouds. And happiness is all the more enjoyable if it follows after anxiety. . . ."

"You are speaking of men. Anything is possible for a man. It only depends on himself."

"I am very contented with my lot, but I would have liked to be a girl, too. All our ambitions and desires are directed by women. Do you realize what it is to be so beautiful, to be twenty years old, and to be able to give yourself up to all the delights of love?"

"Unfortunately I am only a poor girl condemned to live in this cold, dark little city; or in some lonely country house, if a squire of these parts does me the honor of marrying me."

"My dear, don't look at the dark room you are

ON THE KING'S COUCH

in, but gaze through the window, and you will discover a sublime horizon."

"Ah, Monsieur, you are a poet. You can forsake reason in order to follow your dreams. Others are obliged by their circumstances to worry more about realities. . . ."

He came nearer. She sighed softly. Casanova was trembling. He drew her forcefully into his arms, and kissed her eyes, her lips, and caressed her palpitating breasts. She defended herself as best she could, but her alarm was increasing. He became more audacious. In this extremity of danger, Anne recovered her energy. Struggling with silent ardor, she twisted the Chevalier's hands in her nervous fingers, and offered a determined resistance to his attempts. Then by a sudden effort, Casanova came near to succeeding. In a despairing voice she murmured:

"Please, please, I implore you, do not harm me!"

Jacques Casanova experienced a strange change of heart. The greedy pleasure secker, the cynical adventurer, was touched by this plaint . . . He composed himself, and kneeling before the agitated girl:

"You have nothing to fear, my own," he said. "My only desire is to be your slave. Command me, and you will find me ready to obey. But at least, as a reward for my good behavior, grant me one kiss, the kiss you have continued to refuse me. My longing for it is driving me mad."

She bent towards him, and took his dark, striking

THE BALL

face between her burning hands. Their lips met. Then she arose, reeling.

"I must walk about a little. I am giddy. It will do me good."

They left the arbor and turned into a path which followed the lower wall of the garden. They could see the countryside from there, the hillsides loaded with vines, Grenoble sprawled beside its river, and far beyond the wide plain, the nearest summits of the Alps. The moon, round and full, filled the heavens with a cold, pure light. Its white reflection flowed on the rapid Isère. The fields, and the gardens round about, were pale and lifeless, and the tall poplars scattered here and there, flung their long lines up into the foothills. In the fantastic light they seemed spectral, an interminable and funereal procession of sinners come to do penance.

Casanova stood near Anne, and although the blood was still pounding in his temples, he was silent. Then she began to speak, softly, almost in a whisper, but in a tone of deep anxiety.

"Chevalier, I am afraid that you are angry with me. But what would you think of me if I had yielded? You have no doubt found other girls who were less disobliging. But I owe it to myself and to my family."

Then even lower, with delightful simplicity:

"If I ever do get married, I must admit that I would like my husband to be like you."

"How I envy him!" cried Casanova; "why am I not that fortunate mortal!"

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"But you can speak to my aunt. What is there to prevent you? You would be very well received. . . ."

"Alas," he said, with a shrug, "I cannot chain your life to mine. You are young, Anne, and innocent, and you do not know me. . . . What *do* you know about me? Only what I tell you. Listen, I can confide in you, and in you alone: Jacques Casanova is not the rich and brilliant gentleman that he seems. He is Fortune's child, the companion of Chance and Accident. I have lead the strangest, the most disordered existence, filled with dangers, with obstacles, with peculiar happenings, some tragic, some farcical. I believe—nay, I am certain that I will continue to live that way till my last day, guided by uncertainties and whims. I love it, and I was born for it . . . You see, my child, I have been a jack of all trades. At the age of fifteen, I received holy orders, I preached in Venice, I was secretary to a cardinal, I was an officer in the service of the Papal State. At Constantinople, I almost adopted the turban. I languished in a frightful prison and I escaped only by a miracle of daring. I have wandered all over Europe; I have rubbed elbows with the most illustrious society and with the most disgusting scoundrels. I have been mixed in all sorts of intrigues, I have participated in all sorts of political and pecuniary transactions. At times I was powerful, at times a fugitive; sometimes I could throw my money away by the handful, sometimes I was reduced to borrowing a crown from my valet; one day I would be the

THE BALL

king's messenger, the favorite of great personages, the inventor of a lottery capable of making France rich, the next day I would probably be forced to seek my only income through gambling. I have been a magician, a chemist, a man of letters, a swordsman, a financier, a diplomat. I have predicted the future, made diamonds, written poems, killed men, kidnaped women, saved people from misfortune; I have had in my possession family treasures and state secrets, I have seen everything, dared everything, and undertaken everything . . . How in Heaven's name, my darling Anne, can you consider becoming the companion of a man who is so changeable, such a vagabond? How is it, my dear, that I do not frighten you?"

"I do not know," she said, smiling. "But you don't frighten me."

And she raised her head. All the pictures that Casanova had spread out still danced before her eyes. She was silent a moment until she could dissipate them. Then she said:

"I understand; you prefer your solitude and your pleasures. How strange men are. Can one be happy alone?"

The Venetian shook his head gently but did not answer. Anne did not understand. He was perfectly contented. He was still young, his health was good, he had iron muscles, an excellent stomach, and an inexhaustible capacity for pleasure. He was free, without worries, without duties, dependent only on his caprices and his vices. His pocket was full of

ON THE KING'S COUCH

ducats. He had a dazzling wardrobe, a beautiful carriage, sumptuous jewels. He was received everywhere with open arms. His appearance, his wit, his manner, his gayety secured him the friendship of men, the sweet complicity of women. And this present good fortune was increased by the remembrance of the perils he had escaped, the misfortunes of other days. Certainly he was happy. He had created his destiny according to his own liking. Life amused him prodigiously. He would not have bartered it for a throne.

These thoughts flashed through his mind in a second. Anne did not suspect him. In her innocence, she thought he was hesitating. But Casanova, in spite of his desire for her, did not for an instant dream of pronouncing the word she awaited. This victory would be too costly at the price of his liberty.

As he was still silent, she said sadly:

"You don't love me. Perhaps you are attracted toward me. But you do not love me."

"Heaven is my witness that I love you!" cried Casanova. "But it is just because I love you that I want to see you happy. It is a great love, ungrateful child, that makes me give you up, although it will break my heart. You deserve to be a queen; I cannot make you one: that is why I remain silent. Pity me, Anne, and do not reproach me. You will take away my courage. I never needed it more."

"But what do you think that I would want? I have been brought up simply, a very quiet existence would satisfy me. All I ask is to be sure of having

THE BALL

the necessities of life and to love my husband. . . .”

Tears ran down her marvelous face. . . . Casanova felt himself weakening. Then he determined to deprive her of all hope so that he might throw off the sweet chains which were menacing him.

“I could not,” he said firmly, “bear to see you leading the life I would be forced to condemn you to. Every day I would reproach myself for having made you miserable by sacrificing you to my desires. Believe me, my dear Anne, we must forget these dreams. Some day you will thank poor Casanova.”

“Poor Casanova,” she repeated in a plaintive voice. “Poor Casanova.”

He lifted her hand and slipped an emerald ring on her finger; it was the most beautiful of all those he wore.

“Keep it in memory of this night,” he said. “It was given me by the papal legate the last time I went to Avignon. May it bring you good luck, my dear; my regrets will be less bitter.”

She pressed his hand without speaking, wiped her eyes, and tried bravely to smile. The sound of the violins came to them across the garden, the lighted windows recalled her to reality; the ball, relatives, the life she must return to, after she had thought she was escaping. . . .

“Let us go back,” she said. “My aunt must be worried. And now I am cold.”

As they came nearer to the house they met Valenglard and Madame Morin coming to look for them. The good lady enveloped them both with a tender

ON THE KING'S COUCH

look. This solitary promenade seemed to her a happy augury. What a load off her mind with Anne married to this fascinating stranger. And what a position for the family in Grenoble society. She smiled when she saw the emerald ring gleaming on her niece's finger. Anne saw her smile and turned the bezel inward.

They went into the house. Tables had been arranged for faro in the far end of the room where the young people were still dancing. Golden sounds from the violins mingled with chattering and laughter in the vivid, brilliant glow of the declining tapers. The moon had set. It was nearly dawn. A little light glided in through the windows. Several ladies had called for their horses. Madame Morin prepared to depart. Casanova put his carriage at her disposal, and invited her to come and dine with him informally on Thursday with Monsieur Morin, who had not appeared.

"I will have finished your niece's horoscope," he said, "and I have good reason to think that you will all be amazed."

The coachmen were cracking their whips in the brisk morning air. One by one, the velvet suits and damask gowns disappeared into chaises, cabriolets, and coaches. Standing on the terrace before his door, the Chevalier de Seingalt, bareheaded, saluted his departing guests.

"Adieu, my dear Chevalier," said Valenglard, pressing his hand. "Your ball was perfect. It will be the

THE BALL

talk of the city for a long time. I do not think that they could do better at Venice."

"Venice . . ." said Casanova. "Have you ever been to Venice?"

"No, in truth, I have not."

The Chevalier laughed dryly, but his friend did not realize the insolence of that laugh.

"Really? Then do not speak of it, my friend. Venice cannot be imagined. . . ."

After they had all gone, he went upstairs and leaned over the balcony of his room. A beautiful sight greeted him. The sun was rising over the high wall of the Belledonne. The roofs of Grenoble, its towers, its old château, the river, the houses scattered through the valley, bathed in the day's early brilliancy, formed a splendid panorama. It was majestic and varied, and the sternness of the mountains melted into the richness of the earth which was already growing warm in the morning sun.

Casanova did not see it.

He was not sensitive to the beauties of nature; he was not interested in a picturesque river, a mountain, a forest, a peaceful succession of fields. He was a man of the city. And what a city! Valenglard's last words still rang offensively in his ears. Venice! Did this native of a barbarous country dare to compare this paltry diversion to the magic of Venice? Venice, with her opalescent sky, her brightly colored houses basking in quiet waters, where the gondolas were temples of Venus, and the islands havens of sin. Venice, the city of fear, of

ON THE KING'S COUCH

stifled crimes; the city of the ready poniard and the subtle poison; Venice, where luxury is always spiced with danger; Venice, the country dear to his soul; his only regret; his only love, perhaps.

Casanova was revisiting Venice once more.

III

THE HOROSCOPE

HE had slept until midday; alone, and lulled by agreeable dreams. A visionary Anne had proved just as charming, but far less difficult, and Casanova was delighted to find himself absolved of the necessity of sacrificing his precious freedom. He has arisen rested and refreshed, and is working on the horoscope he had promised her. What should he say? He sits and thinks, pen in hand, with several books on astrology and an ephemeris at his elbow. . . . Suddenly he has an idea. An astounding idea, a wild idea, an idea which would permit him to secure Anne's favors without subjecting him to the peril of marriage. And perhaps it would be a step towards making his fortune.

He fills ten pages with erudite quackery, interlarded with abstruse words, and made plausible by the correlation of dates, and the exact position of the stars at the birth of the exquisite Anne. He avoids defining terms, and multiplies the "ifs" and "buts," those priceless resources which rationalize any kind of juggling. He proclaims that happiness awaits Anne in Paris where she will become the King's mistress, bear him a son, and rise to a glorious position. . . . He expects to completely stun Anne and

ON THE KING'S COUCH

her aunt, and perhaps to dazzle even Monsieur Morin. Then they will beg him to escort her to Paris himself. In the post-chaise he will have time and leisure to caress her and win her over.

But that is not all. What was there to prevent this chimerical notion, this brazen invention from materializing? Surely that sudden flash of inspiration was a message from Heaven. He visualizes himself bringing about the presentation of the winning Anne to Louis XV. Nay, better, bringing her to him in person; a noteworthy honor. A few years before he had procured for Louis a darling mistress (after first having experimented, as was only fitting and proper). This was the little O'Morphy, and the excellent M. de Saint-Quentin, minister to the King's pleasures, had acted as mediator. He is quite certain that His Majesty will be kindled at the sight of Anne Roman. Such a lovely flower will tempt this exquisite connoisseur. . . .

If Anne were installed at the court, she would soon become the acknowledged favorite, and it would mean fame and fortune for Casanova. For he would manage to keep her confidence, and continue to be the master of her heart. It would mean access to the world's affairs, to high finance, to politics. . . . With her credit backing him, he would be able to make and ruin ministers; anything seemed possible to his ingenious mind which was filled with innumerable projects. What a marvelous life he would lead, divided between love and power!

A joyous feverishness quickens his heartbeats.

THE HOROSCOPE

The horoscope is a masterpiece, a miracle sprung from his brain, like unto another resplendent Minerva. He reads it, rereads it, adjusts it, polishes it, finishes it, and copies it. All this elaboration takes six hours; but the time has never passed more quickly. When he has completed it, he decides to reward himself for a fine piece of work, and calls Manon and her sister. They all dine in his bed, and he eats with all the appetite of a man who sees the doors to Versailles open and all France at his feet.

The next day, Valenglard is the first to arrive. Monsieur and Madame Morin, with Anne, are soon there. When the customary courtesies have been exchanged and every one is seated, Casanova unfolds his manuscript. He is unable to wait any longer, he is so anxious to find out what its effect is going to be.

"Here is Mademoiselle Roman's horoscope," he says in a pedantic tone. "I believe that it is very worthy of your attention. It is the most extraordinary one that I have ever seen."

After this impressive preamble, he slowly reads his composition. The beginning is extremely obscure, and entirely consecrated to a discussion of the conjunctions of the stars, and their influence. The ladies are visibly impressed. The lawyer retains his look of skepticism. Valenglard, with a great air of being one of the initiate, makes exaggerated signs of approbation. But when the Chevalier comes to his conclusion, and delivers himself of his prophecy, he is

ON THE KING'S COUCH

greeted with a reception that would make the most renowned actor jealous. Although Monsieur Morin remains cold, the Baron's face is expressive of true fanaticism; Madame Morin clasps her hands in ecstasy; Anne, hardly able to breathe, seems petrified with astonishment.

Not for a moment do the two women feel themselves a prey to doubt. The horoscope is cleverly executed, the phenomena link up well, the future is skillfully welded to the past. And Casanova reveals minute details of that past which he has learned from Anne and her aunt, without their realization, and without appearing to amass them.

"This is a great miracle," says Madame finally. "Anne, you will owe all your success to Monsieur le Chevalier. The horoscope affirms that you will become the King's mistress, but it predicts even greater distinction for the future. That is how Maintenon began, and she became the wife of her master. Who knows but that destiny will repeat itself for you. You are her superior, if not in birth, at least in manners. And she was neither as young nor as beautiful as you."

"It is really very possible," says Casanova. "It had occurred to me, too. But there is one essential preliminary to all that: Mademoiselle must go to Paris."

"It was the same way in the case of Madame de Maintenon," resumes the matron, who clings to this parallel. "If she had not left America and come to France, she would not have been a queen—or practi-

THE HOROSCOPE

cally a queen. But how can this trip be arranged? What do you think, my dear?" she asks, turning towards Monsieur Morin.

"I do not see any possible way," the lawyer replies curtly. "Do not count on me to help you."

"Then must we give up this plan?" asks Madame Morin piteously.

"No," says Valenglard with a gravity which evokes an imperceptible smile from Casanova. "Mademoiselle's destiny must be accomplished; this voyage must be undertaken: the powers that be exact it."

Just at this point, Le Duc comes and announces dinner. The Venetian seats his guests at the table. After a few casual remarks, the conversation turns once more upon the horoscope, which is occupying every one's thoughts.

"If Anne is to go to Paris," says her aunt, "it must be soon. The oracle says that the King will fall in love with her before she has accomplished her twenty-second year. She is only ten months short of that. But how shall we set about it?"

"If it is only a case of money," says Casanova, "that is an unimportant trifle. It can be provided."

"It is not only the money. With whom can she make that long journey? I cannot leave Grenoble; I have my daughter to think of."

"And besides that," adds her husband, who still wears the same constrained expression, "rest assured that I would never let her go."

Is Casanova to propose his services? A subtle instinct warns him to wait. He is afraid of giving

ON THE KING'S COUCH

Monsieur Morin grounds for the suspicions he is probably nourishing.

"And then," continued the good woman in an animated tone, "once she has reached Paris, shall she go to the King and say, 'Here I am, Your Majesty'? Who is to present her? But I have an idea. Her sister who lives at the capital! Madame Varnier knows every one in society. . . ."

"That will eliminate a great many obstacles," says Valenglard sententiously. "As soon as she arrives at the home of Madame Varnier, destiny may be entrusted with Mademoiselle's lot. We have only to let it operate."

In spite of his reserve, Casanova cannot resist saying:

"Above all, if you go to Paris, do not breathe a word about the horoscope, nor here either. That might ruin everything. The spirits abhor indiscretion."

Up to that time Anne had been silent. But the frown that wrinkles her brow is an indication of her thoughts. By opposing the trip, her uncle would be able to ruin the prophecy of the horoscope.

"I will not speak to any one about it," she says, "but, take my word for it, all this will remain a dream. I will never see Paris, much less the King."

The Chevalier arises and goes over to his dressing-table. He picks up a roll of paper and drops it into Anne's lap.

"Here are some bonbons for your journey."

"How heavy it is!" says she, weighing it in her

THE HOROSCOPE

hand. She is intrigued, and opens it. Two or three shining coins escape and roll to the floor.

"They are doubloons *da ocho*," says Valenglard, who is on his knees, picking up the fugitives. "Each one is worth three louis, and you have fifty in this package."

Casanova speaks in his most caressing voice:

"Mademoiselle, I implore you to keep them. You can return them to me in Paris when you are rich."

She shakes her head gently and returns the package to him. Tears start to her eyes, and it is only by making a great effort that she can keep them back.

"Anne, you won't refuse!" says the Venetian, tremendously disappointed.

"She is right," says the lawyer shortly. "An undertaking of this sort, based on the uncertain language of the stars, is not only impious, it is scandalous. Anne will remain in Grenoble, and we will find her a match. It will be a great deal better for her, and for all of us."

"What are you saying, Monsieur Morin?"

"My dear wife, I am saying that it is no great honor to be the King's mistress."

"But, see here. . . ."

"Above all these days, when they can be reckoned by the dozen. In times gone by, the King's mistress was a personage at the court. Now she is only a supernumerary at the Parc-aux-Cerfs. A fine future for a respectable girl! Give up everything in order to go and satisfy the caprices of a royal libertine for a few weeks. But we have said enough on this sub-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

ject. I must leave you now; there is a meeting at the House of Parliament, and I am obliged to be there at one o'clock. I will go on foot and wear off the effects of an overabundant lunch."

"If the ladies find it agreeable, we will accompany you half way," proposes the Chevalier. "The sun is still shining, but not so strongly, and you can feel the mountain breeze from here. We will walk slowly, and then we will come back here for tea."

Tea at Grenoble! A tremendous novelty, a supreme elegance. Madame Morin cannot admire the Chevalier enough.

She walks behind the others, leaning on his arm. Casanova returns adroitly to the subject of the journey to Paris. He urges Madame Morin to accept the hundred pistoles secretly. She is a clever woman, and patient. She will be able to influence her husband.

"No, no, that is impossible. He will not go back on his word. You do not know him."

"But, Madame, think of your niece's future. You are extremely fond of her."

"I know, I know. But we must not think of that now. Later, perhaps, I will manage to find a way. . . ."

"Then take this money and use it when you can."

"No, Monsieur le Chevalier, I would never consent to that. And, as a matter of fact, twelve louis are enough to get to Paris, and I can obtain them without any difficulty."

THE HOROSCOPE

They walk along in silence for a few minutes. But Madame Morin cannot be quiet for long:

"However it may turn out, I am deeply grateful to you; my niece is very happy to have been agreeable to you."

"Madame, she is so agreeable to me that I have resolved to leave, rather than destroy her chances of fulfilling the illustrious destiny which awaits her. If it had not been for the oracle, I would have asked for her hand."

"Alas, her happiness would have been much more secure. Declare yourself: we would all be delighted."

"I do not dare to quarrel with destiny."

"But you must not leave so soon."

"I am obliged to, Madame. I have written to Avignon to say that I am coming. You can understand that for my own peace of mind, I must not linger here."

The others have stopped and they join them. The lawyer bids them good day and continues on towards Grenoble. Casanova, Valenglard, and the two women walk back slowly. The Chevalier asks Madame Morin if she will do him the favor of leaving him alone with her niece for a few moments as he has some advice to give her about the horoscope. The good lady sees no harm in it, and takes Valenglard's arm on the way back.

"Anne," murmurs the Chevalier, enveloping her with an ardent glance, "have you confidence in me?"

"Yes, Chevalier, I know very well that you are my friend."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Since your uncle is not to be persuaded, and Madame Morin is afraid to go against his wishes, I have thought of a plan. Be at the little door of your garden on the Rue Saint-Ange to-night at midnight. I will be waiting for you with my chaise. By morning we will be well on our way to Paris."

"You want me to run away?" she asks, pale with emotion.

"Nothing is easier."

"And what will I do in Paris?"

"We will find a means to realize the prophecy written in your horoscope."

She shakes her head without answering.

"Do you not believe in it?" asks Casanova.

"Yes, I believe in it since you did it. You are very learned, and you would not trick me. But the prospect that it offers does not tempt me. I do not need the King of France to be happy."

She raises her eyes to his candidly.

"We will decide that later. The first step is to leave Grenoble. Be ready at eleven o'clock; you will not regret it, Anne."

"No," says she firmly. "Do not play with that idea, Chevalier. You would wait for me in vain. I will not come."

"But why, why?" he asks violently; stupefied, furious at seeing his victim escape.

"Because I do not want to make my family miserable. . . ."

"Your family? Are they so tender about your welfare?"

THE HOROSCOPE

"My uncle is rather cold, but my aunt has always been very good to me. And besides . . ."

She hesitates.

"Go on, I beg of you," says Casanova anxiously.

"And besides, I would be afraid—do not be offended, Chevalier—that you would tire of me too soon."

"I was mistaken. I thought that you were fond of me; that I had aroused your affections. I see it all now, Anne; you do not love me."

"I would have loved you if you had desired it."

He shrugs. He has played and lost. But he is a good gambler. No use wasting his time in vain regrets. Time so spent is wasted. He will not possess the beautiful Anne Roman? Very well, he will meet enough women to make him forget her. His oracle spoke in vain? She will not go to court and bring about his advancement as the King's mistress? What of it? He will find other short cuts to fortune. It is easy for him to relinquish ideas that have become impossible; he has a talent for changing his plans.

When he looks at Anne again, his eyes no longer flash. She is amazed to see him smile. He is already cheerfully resigned.

They are nearing the house.

"Anne, since we have a few moments more together, I will say good-by to you. I want to leave you without any reproaches."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"You are leaving Grenoble?" she asks, greatly upset.

"Yes. There is no longer anything to hold me here."

She attempts to speak indifferently.

"Where are you going? To Lyon?"

"No. I am leaving with my carriage on the barge which descends the Rhône. My landlord made me this proposition a little while ago. I accepted because it reminded me of the *burchiello* which used to take me from Venice to Padua, on the enchanting stream of the Brenta. I was studying with good Doctor Gozzo at that time. What parties we had on that blessed *burchiello* with my fellow students. What good times we had! What pleasure!"

Anne cannot restrain an impatient gesture.

"Pleasure, always pleasure. That is all you think about. Chevalier, I am afraid that you have consecrated your whole life to pleasure."

"And is that not the best reason for existing?"

"I do not know. . . . It would not be sufficient for me."

The repast served in Casanova's room is shadowed by his imminent departure. Anne gazes at him sadly when no one is looking. Madame Morin, although she is enjoying a good meal, sighs deeply from time to time. Valenglard will miss the gay and brilliant companion who changed Grenoble into a paradise for a few days. . . .

THE HOROSCOPE

When it is time to return to town, Casanova offers to accompany the ladies to their door.

"That will add a little while to our enjoyment," says Madame Morin.

Valenglard leaves on foot. He will see his beloved Casanova off to-morrow on the barge. The chaise is so narrow that Anne sits on the Chevalier's knees. While he converses in the most animated style with her aunt, he permits himself a few liberties with the niece. Anne's position obliges her to remain silent. The Venetian takes advantage of her helplessness, and his lack of discretion becomes sheer temerity. Anne resigns herself and closes her beautiful eyes.

She opens them again when the chaise stops at the Rue Saint-Ange. They exchange farewells. Anne would willingly burst into tears. By a supreme effort she controls herself. But love and grief ravage her lovely face. Madame Morin embraces Casanova and instructs her niece to grant him the same mark of friendship. Their kiss is so long, so sweet, so penetrating that Anne almost makes the avowal that is in her heart. Madame Morin is at last enlightened, and frowns. For a moment, Casanova regrets that he has told them that he must irrevocably depart at once.

But he quickly regains his good spirits.

"Come, come," he says, getting into his chaise, "it was high time. I would have made a fool of myself if I had stayed here. Avignon must be my only thought now. It will be very pleasant there. And

ON THE KING'S COUCH

I will see the fountain of Vaucluse, of which Petrarca sang:

*Chiare fresche e dolci acque
Ove le belle membra
Pose colei che sola a me per donna*

He had already relegated Anne Roman to the past. But she had fled to her little room, after her aunt's lecture on the evils of a lack of propriety in young women, and she had flung herself on her bed, her face buried in the pillow, so that no one would hear the bitter sobs into which she was pouring all her ardent youth.

PART TWO

I

AT THE OPERA

THE profusion of tapers burning on the stage, around the boxes, and in the great chandelier with its myriad glittering crystals formed the most dazzling spectacle imaginable. The men wore brightly colored coats and waist-coats; the gowns of the women were brilliant; their towering coiffures were powdered and heightened by decorations of flowers, and their shoulders and arms loaded with diamonds. Every one of any importance in the court, except the Royal family which was averse to appearing in public, had gathered for the first performance of *Les Noces Venitiennes*. Here, too, were the most distinguished people in the city. For over a month Paris had been in a turmoil of expectation. The unimposing hall of the Palais-Royale, white-walled, with seats and boxes upholstered in red damask, had never witnessed such an audience. Even the pit, which was usually reserved for the populace, was filled with the nobility. The corridors were jammed with dukes and peers.

After a musical introduction which was so gay, so lively, and so novel that it was praised on all sides, the curtain rose on a scene depicting the Piazzetto San Marco during a carnival. Venetians of every description promenaded on the stage. Gallants, pro-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

couresses and young girls amused themselves with all sorts of intrigues, and exchanged smiles and kisses beneath the complacent eyes of mothers, who seemed only interested in furthering these budding love affairs. Then the Doge, followed by his twelve councilors, appeared from the wings in purple robes. Suddenly they advanced to the center of the stage and began to dance a *pas d'ensemble* interspersed with all sorts of capers.

Casanova broke into a loud laugh.

He was accustomed to the extreme liberty of the Italian theaters where the audience chatters, sings, whistles, coughs, and comes and goes without bothering about the actors. In this French gathering where the only disturbance was a few whispered words and the gentle play of fans, his laugh was as out of place as a blare of trumpets. Morosini, the Venetian ambassador, nudged him. Heads were turned in the near-by seats; people looked at him curiously. Madame de Pompadour was holding court in the nearest box, surrounded by courtiers and ladies in elaborate costumes. One gentleman with a great many decorations was separated from Casanova only by the railing. Turning his inflated face with its puffy eyes, he murmured disdainfully:

"From what country does Monsieur come?"

"From Venice, Monsieur, where the Doges do not perform in ballets," answered Casanova curtly and in a very loud voice.

"Really. I am no longer amazed. I recall that I laughed considerably at your operas."

AT THE OPERA

"It is quite probable, Monsieur, but I am certain that no one took the liberty of objecting to your laughter."

This reply, rendered more vivid by the decidedly Italian manner in which it was delivered, rang out like a challenge.

"For Heaven's sake, Chevalier, calm yourself," whispered Count Aldo Ranucci, counselor for the Venetian embassy, who was in the box directly behind Casanova. "Do you know who that is? You will find yourself in trouble shortly. That is the Maréchal Duc de Richelieu."

"Truly," said Casanova, "the devil himself could not prevent me from laughing when I chose. And Monsieur de Richelieu is not the devil. At most he is his cousin."

The Marquise de Pompadour smiled, and with her fan signaled to the Maréchal to sit next to her. Flattered by this favor, Richelieu forgot the affront.

The Chevalier also controlled himself and turned his attention once more to the stage. Just then wild applause resounded from the pit where a number of young men were assembled. A tall dancer wearing a mask, an enormous black wig which entirely covered his shoulders, and a blue velvet robe open down the front, advanced with measured steps.

"It is Dupré, the famous Dupré," whispered Ranucci. "He is the best dancer in France."

The orchestra played softly. Dupré raised his arms slowly, made a few complicated and graceful motions over his head, took one step to the right and one to

ON THE KING'S COUCH

the left, made a few pirouettes and then disappeared with great rapidity. Casanova refused to applaud; he remained completely indifferent to the dancer's prowess. He was quite sure that he had seen much better performances at Milan and even at Naples. He blew his nose several times without the slightest intention of disturbing any one, but the Duc de Richelieu, having already had his attention attracted to Casanova, was inclined to resent this catarrhal interlude. Once again he leaned over.

"You have a very bad cold, Monsieur. Apparently your windows do not close very well."

"It grieves me that I am forced to contradict you, Monsieur; my windows are air-tight."

Unfortunately, his Italian accent made *calfeutrée* sound exactly like *calfoutré*. Every one in the Marquise's box broke into loud laughs. Casanova blushed very red and cursed the subtleties of the French language. Luckily it was time for the *entr'acte*, and in the uproar he regained his customary assurance. It never deserted him for long.

Madame de Pompadour whispered something, and the Duke motioned to the ambassador, whom he had already saluted.

"My dear Morosini," he said, "Madame la Marquise has asked me to request you to introduce her to your amusing compatriot."

The fat pompous little ambassador made a deep bow and led Casanova to the favorite's box.

"I hope, Madame, that you will pardon Monsieur Casanova. He is not yet accustomed to the ways

AT THE OPERA

of the Court, and he considers this the brightest moment of his life, since you have permitted him to be presented to you."

Without seeming to, Madame de Pompadour measured the Chevalier with a glance. He made a fine appearance in his plum-colored moire suit with its cloth of gold trimmings, and a ruby in his jabot. His sword had an opal hilt.

Adroitly he paid the Marquise a compliment, a compliment that was not deemed too crudely Italian. Madame de Pompadour extended her hand to him and he bent over it.

Just the same, there was something about this stranger, his glance, his words, which annoyed her slightly. She was a woman with strong intuitions, and he did not altogether please her. She was clever at concealing her biases, so she was all the more smiling and gracious.

Perhaps she was not the most beautiful woman at Versailles—she was already forty—but she was still the prettiest, the most graceful, the most elegant and refined. She wore a dress of yellow brocade with enormous panniers; it was embroidered with silken flowers and stitched with silver thread, and there were yellow roses in her powdered hair. She wore very little rouge and her large gray eyes were mobile and intelligent, her dimpled chin very willful, her neck long and slender, and her charming breast covered with diamonds worth three million francs. Her manners were exquisite; her slightest movement full of grace. Smiling, fanning herself, lifting her

ON THE KING'S COUCH

skirt, curtseying, listening, thanking a friend, attracting people, holding them enthralled; in other words, being agreeable, she was inimitable. Her attitudes were so perfect and so varied that they seemed natural. It was not apparent that they were calculated to create an effect.

At the back of the box was a tall man, very pale, simply dressed in black velvet with an order on his breast. His tired and seemingly worn-out face was a frame for glowing greenish eyes with a strangely inquiring look: Monsieur de Sartine, Lieutenant-General of the Police. He came towards Casanova.

"We are already acquainted, Chevalier," he said, bowing slightly.

Casanova's coolness was imperceptibly marred. He had had occasion to know Sartine during his last stay in Paris. It was an equivocal story: a girl, in difficulty, whose enraged mother demanded that he marry her. The Venetian had got out of this misunderstanding with very little trouble.

"Yes, indeed, Monsieur, and I am delighted to offer you my homages."

Casanova had held out his hand, Sartine touched his finger-tips.

"Still as much of a ladies' man, Monsieur de Casanova? Beware of the girls of Paris."

These words contained an ironical warning. The Chevalier disposed of it airily.

"How can it be helped? In Venice, our motto is: *La mattina una messetta, l'apodisnar una bassetta e la*

AT THE OPERA

notte una donnetta. It is in my blood; wherever I am, I remain faithful to that."

"But that mass you spoke of," said Richelieu, "I suppose you never miss that, Chevalier?"

"Oh, the mass . . . why I go through the ceremony all by myself."

This sally amused the Marquise who was the enemy of Jesuits and of the devout in general. Sartine compressed his lips and retired into his corner.

"Monsieur de Sartine is not in a very good humor," said Casanova to the Duke, coming to the front of the box. "He makes me think of a great black spider spinning its web in secret."

"Try to avoid being caught," said the Duke laughing.

"I will take care, Monsieur."

During the short time that the Chevalier spent near Madame de Pompadour, he spoke of Italian music and dancing. He had the good taste to prefer the French school, and praised Dupré very highly.

"He is divine," said the Duc de Gontaut idiotically. He was a stupid looking little man who stood behind the Marquise's chair.

And the Maréchale de Mirepoix, holding Madame de Pompadour's pug dog in her lap, added in her fog-horn voice which contrasted so strangely with her thin little body and small weazened face:

"That is true dancing. Dupré is sixty years old, he has been dancing the same way for forty years, and it is always a fresh pleasure."

"And what do you think of the ladies of the

ON THE KING'S COUCH

ballet?" asked the Maréchal de Richelieu. "Which do you think is more beautiful, Le Maur or Deschamps?"

"Deschamps, Monsieur."

"But her legs are so ugly."

"You cannot see them very well beneath her domino. Besides, whenever I examine a woman's beauty, *la première chose que j'écarte, ce sont ses jambes.*"

This time everybody, including Madame de Pompadour, laughed heartily. Casanova laughed, and the learned Morosini laughed a little after the others.

"Ah, Monsieur," said de Mirepoix, "you should have seen La Camargo in her youth. She was the first artist who dared to spring and jump on the French stage. She could perform the *saut de basque*, and even the *gargouillade*, and although she wore nothing beneath her domino, she did it so well that she was never immodest."

"But in that case, how could you tell that she wore nothing?"

"That is one of those things that can be easily ascertained. I see that you are indeed a stranger, Monsieur."

The *entr'acte* was nearly over.

"*Parbleu,*" said de Richelieu, clapping Casanova on the shoulder, "I admire you, Monsieur, we would get along very well. Come and see me some morning. Let me know if I can be of any service to you."

Casanova went back to the Venetian ambassador's box very well pleased with himself. The second scene

AT THE OPERA

was designed to represent the interior of the Doge's palace. Richly appareled dancers contorted themselves in unison. Then a woman entered from the right, bowed, leaped, turned, executed a few steps, ran to one end of the stage with a mechanical ardor, came back, and bent her knees, head thrown back, one hand raised, the other on her heart as if a mysterious influence had transfixed her. The whole assemblage applauded furiously.

"That is La Camargo," said Ranucci.

"In view of her looks," said Casanova, "I am not much interested in whether or not she wears tights."

During the next *entr'acte*, while he was tasting a sherbet, as the custom was in Venice, Casanova was able to examine the audience. Ranucci, in the rôle of benevolent guide, pointed out the celebrities to him.

Four years had elapsed since the last time the adventurer had been in Paris. His only remaining connections were a few former Italian friends, like the Baletti; tradespeople, and girls of the poorer classes, and the shopkeepers and the girls would not have received him overeagerly. Among well established persons, he still knew a few creatures of Cardinal de Bernis', his former protector, who was now in disgrace at Rome. Very few houses were open to him. He was faced with the problem of establishing new relations and making good connections once more. For he was fondling all sorts of plans, any one of which would infallibly lead him straight to fame and fortune. His vanity was as

ON THE KING'S COUCH

great as his extravagance. Although he was an exile ever since he had escaped from the Leads, he had nonetheless sought out the Venetian ambassador, a relative of his first patron, Monsieur de Bragadin. The Comte de Morosini was a good-natured man, and easy to circumvent. He invited Casanova to accompany him to the opera with a few members of the legation. This was a great piece of good fortune for the Chevalier; his introduction to Pompadour was even more gratifying. Richelieu's invitation, in view of his tremendous influence with the King, could bring him rapid advancement at Court. The evening had been fruitful. Casanova could not have hoped for a better début.

Lorgnette in hand, he examined each box attentively. They were lighted within, and they seemed like tiny individual theaters where the most celebrated people in Europe appeared for their own good pleasure.

"Over there by the stage," said his guide, "with the blue ribbon, is the Prime Minister, Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul."

Ranucci pointed discreetly to an ugly little man with a bright crimson face. His unpowdered hair had a reddish tinge, but his eyes were full of fire and life.

"I recognize him," said Casanova. "I used to see him when my friend Bernis was interested in politics. I was not very well pleased with Monsieur de Choiseul. He sent me to Holland and our relations have been cold ever since."

AT THE OPERA

"His sister, the Duchesse de Gramont, is with him."

"Are they still so delightfully intimate?"

"That is a piece of gossip which was probably never true," answered the embarrassed Ranucci. "A great many tales have been told about Monsieur de Choiseul's adventures. I think that he is more likely interested in Madame de Pompadour."

"What? With her infirmities? I should have considered him possessed of more delicacy."

In the next box sat a tall plain woman with hollow brilliant eyes.

"The Maréchale de Luxembourg, once Madame de Boufflers."

"Good God, how she has aged. She is spectral. And she used to be so piquante. That adorable Duchess—do you remember the verse?

*"Quand Boufflers parut a la cour,
On crut voir la mère d'Amour;
Chacun s'empressait a lui plaire,
Et chacun lui plut a son tour.*

"But who is that seated on her right? She looks so sweet and modest."

"That is her daughter-in-law, Princesse de Robecq. She leads a very unhappy life; the Maréchale cannot abide her."

"Those old devils are fearful when they reform. And who is that distinguished woman over there, with such beautiful eyes and her face pockmarked? She is talking to a man who looks like a monkey.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

... But I can't be mistaken! It is the illustrious d'Alembert."

"You have a good memory, Chevalier. That is indeed Monsieur d'Alembert, secretary in perpetuity to the Academy. And the lady is the famous Mademoiselle de Lespinasse whose salon is the best in Paris. That fop behind her is the Comte de Guibert, the author of the *Prise de Calais*."

"I have read it. It is very tedious."

"Mademoiselle de Lespinasse is mad about him. She writes to him morning and evening, and he, fat and slothful, has only one thought: to marry, and get rid of her."

"In the next box, there are two ladies who look very much alike. No doubt they are sisters?"

"Not at all. At court they call them the two Marécales: Madame de la Tour-Maubourg and Madame de Balincourt. They are no relation to each other, but they are close friends. They are so much alike that their children make mistakes, and there is a story that the Maréchal de Balincourt once attempted to make a mistake."

"I can understand that very readily. But were I Monsieur de Balincourt I would like to make the comparison more complete. Together they would make a pleasing study."

"The Marécales would hardly lend themselves to that diversion. To bring you back to a more wholesome point of view, let me point out a very worthy woman: over there, with the black lace scarf over her head; Madame Geoffrin."

AT THE OPERA

"I should hope there were no scandals attached to her name. She is a grandmother, and as coarse and ugly and common as a turnip. Does she still hold a salon?"

"Certainly. Rue Saint-Honoré. There is always a mob. One meets a great many prominent strangers there. The old man on her right is Count Poniatowski, the father of the man they are mentioning for the Polish throne. Marmontel is behind her."

"The author of *Belisaire*? He is very talented."

"He has just emerged from the Bastille. Monsieur de Choiseul sent him there for a libel against the Duc d'Aumont. They say now that he was not really the author of the libel. Madame Geoffrin moved heaven and earth to free him. She turns friendship into a mania."

"And who is that lovely majestic woman?"

He was looking at a Junoesque creature, grave and heraldic, swathed in an ermine wrap. She wore her rouge in a singular fashion, in a broad band beneath her eyes. The rest of her face was very pale.

"Madame de Brionne. She is no longer fashionable. Then we have Madame de Brancas who has brought along her favorite monkey. She is infatuated with animals, and sleeps in her aviary. Madame de Vivonne is with her; she is all in green. With President Molé is the Duc d'Aiguillon, who has just returned from his post in Brittany, where Parliament is opposing him so bitterly."

"Does the Queen and the religious party still protect him?"

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"They always will, Chevalier. He is at the head of the cabal which is trying to overthrow Madame de Pompadour and Choiseul. Will they succeed? All that is necessary is for the King to take sick, for His Majesty takes fright at the slightest illness and returns to the Church. Then there is the Marquise du Deffand, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse's former patroness, at present her rival. Lord Walpole has become her watchdog, for she is blind."

"I have heard of her. She is very witty, but she is a malicious woman."

"She is very much neglected since d'Alembert betrayed her after being faithful for twenty years, and ran after the damsel who now twists him around her little finger."

"Then there is Madame du Chatelet, the Duc and Duchesse de Villard, Lord Keith, all great friends of Monsieur de Voltaire; then the Marquis de Marigny, the brother of Madame de Pompadour."

"He is courted almost as much as she."

"It is because he is Superintendent of Buildings, and has enormous credit through his sister. The dark man he is speaking to is Doctor Quesnay, the famous economist, the physician and friend of the favorite."

"Thank you, my dear Count, you are a sorcerer with a magic wand, giving me back Paris and the Court. . . . But see here. . . ."

His lorgnette had paused at a narrow box which held two women, alone and slightly withdrawn. It was almost opposite the vast box of Madame de Pom-

AT THE OPERA

padour. One of them was tall, with beautiful shoulders, and she wore a white velvet mask. She looked regal in her blue moire panniers. The other was also very richly dressed, but she had ordinary features, a retroussé nose and ferret-like eyes.

Ranucci himself stared at them attentively.

"Is it possible? . . . Yes, I couldn't be mistaken. It is the Baronne. She must have finally decided to appear in public. This is truly an eventful occasion.

Casanova was intrigued.

"What Baronne?"

"The Baronne de Meilly Coulonge. The other woman must be her sister. They say she is a bourgeoisie, the wife of a city official."

"Every one seems to be looking at them."

"Naturally, the King adores Madame de Meilly: she will soon make him a father. Some say that she is the future favorite. Maybe, if she knows how to set about it. . . . Just see how scornfully Madame de Pompadour stares at her. She recognized her in spite of her mask. A mask is not a sufficient disguise for such a beautiful woman."

"Madame de Meilly. . . . This is the first time I have heard that name."

"She has had her title only a short while. She is still often called by her maiden name: Mademoiselle de Romans."

"My dear Count, what did you say her name was?"

"Mademoiselle de Romans. She is really very beautiful. Don't you think so, Chevalier?"

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Lovely . . ." stammered Casanova.

For a moment he was dizzy. Anne Roman, and at Paris. It was not only the name. In spite of the tremendous change in environment, in dress, in attitude even, Casanova recognized the little orphan from Grenoble. He had an extraordinary memory for feminine beauty, and he saw again the charming figure which he had admired beneath the indulgent gaze of Madame Morin. It was Anne; he was sure of it. There she was before his very eyes, only a few feet away. The King's mistress, and she was going to bear him a child! His prophecy was being miraculously carried out. But the horoscope had been a deliberate and fantastic bit of trickery; a means of getting Anne to Paris and keeping her in his power. When he left Grenoble, after this gallant project had failed completely, he had never for a moment thought that his horoscope would prove to be more than a chimerical memory in the heart of a beautiful girl, bound to narrow and humble circumstances. The horoscope had been a jovial imposture, a form of amusement, a jest, and by a strange quirk of destiny it had materialized. If only the child of Anne and the King proved to be a son, Casanova would be the most illustrious astrologer in the world. This was a tremendous adventure, the most extraordinary he had ever had.

He was suffused with vanity, but at the same time, he had another feeling deep within him: an indistinct feeling that closely resembled emotion.

Was he capable of emotion; he, Casanova? After

AT THE OPERA

his incredible life of adventure and risk, dissipation and intrigue? And yet . . . He put his hand over his jabot. His heart was beating a little faster than usual. He smiled. It was amazing.

He excused himself to the ambassador and started for the door of the box. He would go to Anne and acquaint her of his presence. But just then the music began and the curtain went up. It would scarcely have been polite to leave. He resigned himself and sat down, but the play had lost all interest for him and from time to time he looked lingeringly at the woman he had most desired in all his career as lover. It was strange that she should suddenly appear when he had almost forgotten her. He shut his eyes for a moment; leaning on the edge of the box, he was lost in pleasant memories of Grenoble, his humble party, his walk in the garden with Anne, the kisses he had stolen from her, her resistance. . . .

His face was burning. He opened his eyes, and raised his head towards the little box. It was empty. The two women had disappeared.

They would certainly not come back. The last act was almost over; probably they had gone early in order to avoid the crush. Or . . . had she seen him and fled? Silently Casanova cursed himself for the worst kind of fool. What an imbecile he had been to take so long to notice some one of vital interest to him. A golden opportunity gone.

Little by little he became calmer. As a matter of fact it was a good thing that he had not gone to her before all those hundreds of curious eyes. Anne's

ON THE KING'S COUCH

position demanded a certain amount of discretion. He must not compromise her. The main thing was that he had found her again. He was certain to overcome any obstacle that might impede their reunion. Anne had loved him; of that he was certain. He had only to see her once more, and he would regain his influence over her. And it was child's play for Casanova to arrange to see her.

There was a flurry of applause; the actors were taking their bows.

"The finale was delightful. How did you like it, Chevalier?" said Morosini.

"Charming, Your Excellency," answered Casanova thoughtfully. "I am indebted to you for an unusually interesting evening."

II

THE HAREM FAVORITE

"CHEVALIER," said Madame Varnier, coming into her drawing-room, "Anne is not here yet. Let us have a little chat until she arrives. I have a thousand things to discuss with you, things that I was unable to mention yesterday. I was completely overcome at seeing you here. For months I have heard of no one but you. There was no one in the world I was as eager to meet."

Casanova bowed and took a tiny slip of folded paper from his pocket.

"Madame, first let me thank you for delivering your sister's note. When I read it I nearly died of joy: *'When I once more behold Monsieur le Chevalier de Seingalt, it will be one of the happiest moments of my life.'*

"You see, I know it by heart. How charming Anne is! You will, I hope, allow me to address her as I did in Grenoble. We were very good friends."

"I know, I know. Anne has told me everything. And as a friend, Chevalier, you were fairly enterprising. . . . But I can understand that. Anne is so beautiful. And she deserves a great deal of credit for resisting you; you had touched her heart.

"Ah, Monsieur," she added saucily, "Monsieur, how

ON THE KING'S COUCH

many poor unsuspecting girls you must have deceived in the course of your career. With your bearing, your eyes, your voice, you must have turned many heads and caused countless tears to flow."

"You are utterly mistaken, Madame," answered the Venetian gayly. "All my life I have been deceived by women. I am too fond of them to avoid their snares even when I perceive them, and I must admit that I perceive them almost always. Their beauty, their voices, their gestures intoxicate me. I am ready to fall at their feet. It is my greatest weakness. Had it not been for women I would have had a totally different life. But how can I experience any regret? I have felt raptures that no other man, in all probability, has realized."

Madame Varnier smiled indulgently. Such passionate admiration of the fair sex did not meet with her disapproval.

"I believe that Anne still feels a very tender interest in you, Monsieur. I am delighted, for your marvelous horoscope really decided her fate."

"I am overcome with joy, Madame. But although I discovered Anne's destiny, its realization is due to you."

"As a matter of fact, that is true. If it had not been for me, Anne would have stayed in Grenoble. When the time decreed by the oracle had elapsed, she would have become the wife of a humble little clerk who had appeared on the scene and asked for her hand. Fortunately, Heaven granted that I should be there."

THE HAREM FAVORITE

"But how did you manage? Monsieur Morin had no faith in the prediction. It must have been no easy task to deal with him."

"It would have been a complete waste of time to attempt to reason with him. My uncle is stubbornness incarnate. But my aunt sees things entirely through my eyes. I went to Dauphiny for Christmas, as I always do. During the course of a conversation, my aunt told me about you, about your visit in Grenoble, and finally about the amazing horoscope. I was very much impressed. What good fortune for Anne and her whole family, I thought, if it should come true. I thought it over for a long time. All my doubts were dissipated when I considered how extremely beautiful my sister was. I was convinced that it would not be possible for the King to remain indifferent to her charms, were he to find himself in her presence. I said nothing to Monsieur Morin, nor even to Anne. But I arranged everything with my aunt, and as I was about to return to Paris, I proposed that I should take my sister along and let her spend a few months in the capital before she was married. Monsieur Morin did not dare refuse. Anne was delighted at the thought of visiting Paris. My aunt made preparations for our departure. We were here by the middle of January.

"I dressed Anne tastefully, introduced her to all my friends so that she might learn a little about the world from people accustomed to society, and then showed her to Lebel. As you probably know, he is

ON THE KING'S COUCH

the first lord in waiting to His Majesty, and has the King's full confidence in matters of the flesh. I have known him for a long time. He was wildly enthusiastic. At his request, an excellent artist painted a miniature of Anne and Lebel undertook to show it to the King. All this was done without my sister's knowledge, for, as you have had occasion to know, she is rather timid and might have been frightened by these preparations.

"Shortly after Lebel returned to tell me that the King was already impatient and desirous. He invited both of us to come for tea in his apartment at Versailles, promising that he would show us the château afterwards. We went. Anne wore a ravishing gown, and was lovely enough to tempt a saint. It was a very gay party. Lebel suggested that he conduct us through the Galerie des Glaces. I excused myself, saying that I was tired, so my sister went with Lebel. He showed her the apartments of state, then led her into the King's private chambers and finally led her into the room where the King was waiting.

"Lebel vanished. The King was ardent and persuasive, and was able to appeal to Anne's tender heart, after she had recovered from her first surprise. What more can I say, Chevalier? A week later, having upon my advice rejected as unworthy of her, the suggestion that she reside in the Parc-aux-Cerfs, my sister was presented with an establishment in Passy. The King furnished a beautiful home for her, and often visits her, when she does not herself go to Versailles in a coach with six horses which is sent from the

THE HAREM FAVORITE

royal stables to fetch her. The King is miserable whenever he is away from her. Every other day he spends several hours with her. If she had more talent for intrigue, or if even she were more amenable to suggestion—for as you can well imagine, she did not lack advice from me—she could have a great deal more than she has. Kindly tell me what the title of Baroness amounts to, or a little piece of property, when Pompadour holds the ranks of Duchess and Grandee of Spain, with an income totaling millions and Heaven knows how many châteaux?”

Madame Varnier's ferret-like eyes glistened avaciously. If she were beautiful, thought Casanova, she would know how to make the most of her charms. This settled bourgeoisie, with her magistrate husband (as a matter of fact they were separated), and her well furnished house, exhibited astounding capacities for the profession of procuress. Her story was recited with a quiet impudence which delighted the Venetian. He felt certain that if he could arouse her sympathy, she would be an invaluable ally. She was evidently fond of money. It seemed to him that he had heard that she gambled. He would give her an opportunity for satisfying her vice!

“I approve heartily of all that you have done,” said the Chevalier. “Your sister can claim any right. And when her son is born. . . .”

“Are you certain that it will be a son?”

“Didn't the horoscope say so?” answered Casanova, with his sly caressing smile, “and I have no proof of its having been mistaken up to date. Unless I made

ON THE KING'S COUCH

a huge mathematical error, the end will surely correspond to the beginning. I repeat, that when her son is born, Anne should become the most prominent woman at court, if she proceeds wisely."

"I am glad that you agree with me. I am continually telling her that. Chevalier, I am very pleased with your attitude. I feel that we will become fast friends."

"Intimate friends, if the decision rests with me, and for the advancement of our Anne. . . . But isn't that her carriage I hear?"

They went towards the tall windows which face on the Rue de Richelieu and admit greenish shafts of daylight into the discreet little salon with its gray wainscoting. A magnificent carriage had stopped before the door. The coachmen and postilions wore the blue and gold of the royal livery. Madame Varnier proudly pointed them out:

"You see, Chevalier."

The door opened. Anne appeared, her face glowing from the effort of coming up stairs. A slight corpulency betrayed her. She turned immediately to Casanova; her soft brown eyes rested caressingly on his face while she responded indifferently to Madame Varnier's kisses and eager attentions.

"Monsieur," she said, stretching out both her hands to Casanova, "I am very happy to see you again. I do not deny," she added naïvely, "that when I came to Paris I had hoped for this. I thought of you so much! But you must have been astonished to find me here."

THE HAREM FAVORITE

"Hardly astonished, my dear," he answered, leading her over to a low couch near the fireplace where a bright fire burned, and helping her off with her pelisse. "Didn't the planets prophesy this?"

"Yes, that is true," she said dreamily, "the planets. . . . What an extraordinary adventure it was! I haven't recovered from it yet. . . ."

She looked at Casanova once more, and sighed softly.

"But what of our friends in Grenoble? What does Madame Morin think of all this?"

"My aunt is in ecstasy. She is sought out by the whole town now. I had a letter from her a month ago. You are the only subject of conversation in Grenoble. If you ever returned, Chevalier, they would certainly not let you go away again."

"And your uncle, that distinguished lawyer?"

"You know what he is like. He does not approve of my metamorphosis at all, but I am sure that at heart he is not displeased. My aunt sent me a message from him asking if he could not be given a seat in Parliament. That is a fairly good indication of his attitude."

"Don't let him come here. That would be a serious mistake, my love."

"No, no. My sister says that he has no desire to do that. He wants to be appointed counselor at Grenoble."

"That is very fortunate. It is not at all impossible, and might very well be considered," said he gravely, as though he were already in a position to give away

ON THE KING'S COUCH

all the appointments in France. "And our excellent friend Valenglard? What news of him?"

"He is extolling you to the skies like all the rest, and predicts a marvelous future for you."

"After all," said Casanova expansively, "perhaps he is right. Valenglard is really not such a fool."

"But tell me about your own affairs, Chevalier. What have you been doing for the last year?"

"I have been traveling."

"Still traveling? But what are your plans now? Do you expect to remain in Paris?"

"Yes indeed. At least for a while. However, I have some important business which will require my presence at Aix-la-Chapelle very shortly. A very interesting experiment in magic with Madame d'Urfé. . . ."

"You frighten me, Chevalier. Aren't these matters extremely dangerous?"

"Do not be afraid, my dear. I have a great deal of experience in affairs of this kind. The spirits harm only ignorant people who pry unthinkingly into their mysteries. And I know how to go about it."

"La Marquise d'Urfé . . . I am very curious to know what you two do together."

"It would not interest you, Anne. We are students of cabal and magic. . . . She wants me to rejuvenate her, and I have consented. As a matter of fact, I do not claim that I will succeed. I am returning to Paris very soon, and I intend to make my permanent residence here."

THE HAREM FAVORITE

"Your friends will all be delighted," said Anne, "myself above all."

"I have tossed about the world sufficiently. I would like to settle down comfortably and look after my own interests a little. Above all, dearest Anne, since I have been fortunate enough to find you again, I would like to be able to serve you now that you are a great personage. And your greatness is in its infancy; it needs only to be bolstered up in order to achieve further heights."

"That is a very sensible remark," said Madame Varnier. "Listen carefully to what the Chevalier has to say, my treasure. He can give you the very best advice. But what did you do yesterday? Weren't you supposed to see the King?"

"Yes, I went to Versailles. The King was very kind and very considerate. I was a little worried. Your telling me about the arrival of Monsieur de Casanova had awakened memories. The King was most attentive; I spoke to him about our child. He seemed very much interested, and once more assured me that I might set my mind completely at rest about his future.

"Besides, I received this letter this morning just before I left."

She took a letter from her bodice. It was marked with the private crest of Louis XV. She handed it to Casanova.

"A letter from the King!" screamed Madame Varnier, who was in transports. "That is news indeed."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Versailles, December eighth 1761.

I was quite aware, my sweet, that you had something on your mind when you left here, but I was not quite sure what it was. I do not wish our child to be registered under my name in the baptismal register, but on the other hand, I do not wish to find myself unable to recognize him, if I should desire to a few years from now. Let the child be inscribed as Louis-Aimé, or Louise-Aimée, son or daughter of Louis le Roy or Louis Bourbon as you choose. So long as you do not leave a blank, put whatever you like for yourself. I would also like the godfather and the godmother to be poor people or servants.

I kiss you and embrace you tenderly, my dearest.

LOUIS."

"Accept my heartiest congratulations, my dear," said Casanova after he had read aloud the royal letter. "It is the first step—and the most important—towards the recognition of the child. Has His Majesty ever done as much for a mistress before?"

"Never," said Madame Varnier. "The fruits of his love affairs have always been a secret. Dearest sister, the King adores you; you will become the established mistress and when the Queen dies—and she is failing more each day—perhaps even better things await you."

"Madeleine is building castles in Spain," said Anne laughingly. "She is picturing me on the throne of France."

"And why not? It was due to religious scruple

THE HAREM FAVORITE

that Louis XIV married his last mistress. His grandson is very devout and has a great deal of respect for hell fire. Some day he may very well be urged by the same motive. Bear that in mind, Anne, and be clever and careful as well. You have enemies. . . .”

“Enemies? Oh, no,” said the Venetian. “Only one enemy, but the most redoubtable imaginable. A woman skilled in the art of amusing, who knows exactly what her master likes and dislikes, what pleases and distracts him, and can completely govern him without its becoming apparent. She is at once a prime minister and a procuress. As long as that female devil is in evidence, your fate, my dear, will remain precarious. You will never be safe until you have destroyed Madame de Pompadour.”

“Will I ever be able to, Chevalier?” asked Anne with a discouraged shrug. “How can a poor country girl like me struggle successfully with a woman of the world who has ruled the Court for the last fifteen years?”

“Just think it over, Anne,” said Casanova, taking both her hands. “You are young, you are beautiful, very beautiful, you are carrying the King’s child. There is no doubt that the Marquise is very subtle; just the same she has some very powerful enemies. Half the Court detests her. The Queen, the Dauphin, Mesdames, and the important clergy would do anything in the world to hasten her downfall. She amuses the King, but since her illness deprives Madame de Pompadour of all physical intimacies, her influence is at the mercy of every wind that blows.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

It remains for us to create an opportunity. It is not impossible to alienate that Prince from her; he is noble and proud, but very indolent and prone to allow himself to be influenced. Only listen to us, my darling, to your sister and me, and I swear to you that some day you will be Queen."

"One is forced to believe that you are a sorcerer, Chevalier," said Madame Varnier with a grateful little wink. "In the week that you have been in Paris, you have found out all that there is to know about the Court."

"Isn't a week enough? Dear lady, I am not in the habit of wasting my time. I could tell you little details about Versailles and the people around the Prince that would certainly surprise you."

"I take your word for it. And now I must go. I have an appointment in the city. I shall leave you and Anne together. Give her some good advice; she will listen to you more readily than to me. I shall see you very soon, I hope. I am at home every evening, and a few close friends always stay to supper. I hope that you will join us from now on. Can I count on you for this evening?"

"If I am a sorcerer, you, Madame, are certainly an enchantress. Circe was a schoolgirl in comparison with you. I shall have the honor of presenting you with my homage after I leave Madame la Duchesse de Chartres. I have an appointment with her very shortly."

"The Duchesse de Chartres! Are you going to bring back her youth, too?"

THE HAREM FAVORITE

"She is scarcely in need of that, but I am in hopes of restoring her lovely complexion, which has become marred."

"Yes, indeed, poor soul! Her face is covered with pimples. She no longer dares to leave the house."

"In a few days her skin will be rose red and lily white, like yours, Mesdames."

"And what will you do for me, dear Chevalier?" asked Madame Varnier with the manner of a refractory child. "Will you make me very very beautiful?"

"I will do anything you like," answered Casanova, screwing up his eyes maliciously.

"I doubt whether I should leave you alone with Anne. You do not inspire confidence."

Lovely Anne Roman smiled a little vaguely; her thoughts were wandering.

"And now that we are alone," said the Chevalier, seating himself close beside her on the ottoman and tenderly clasping her broadened waist. "Tell me now, my sweet, whether you are happy. I hope you are, but I must be certain."

A melancholy expression came over her classic face.

"Happy? I don't know. Every one envies me, but can one be happy if one has lost one's self-respect? It is a year since I have really laughed. Do you remember, in Grenoble, how heartily I used to laugh? Yet I was poor and helpless. To-day I have diamonds and gowns and waiting women and a mansion.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

Duchesses come to call on me. People beg me for my protection. All this only bores me and oppresses me."

"But you are fond of the King?"

"Of course. I would be very ungrateful were I not. He is the soul of thoughtfulness and courtesy. Nevertheless I can admit to you, my dear Chevalier, that the King is not exactly amusing. Very often my only resource is to yawn with him."

"I was a little afraid of that," said Casanova sternly. "You should learn to cheer him up. Be gay and lively and easy to please. Forget your bourgeois training, and adopt the manner of a woman of the world, and always maintain a semblance of interest. That is the best way to keep him under your influence. I suppose he is an excellent lover?"

She looked at him in astonishment, not immediately understanding. Then she blushed, a little shocked, and answered him with only a nod.

"That is very important," said the Chevalier, toying with the lace ruffles about his wrists. "The Marquise will at least be unable to compete with you in that respect. She has surrendered her arms."

Anne rubbed her forehead with a hand that trembled a trifle.

"Oh, please try to understand, dear Chevalier, that I was born to enjoy a simpler life. I do not think that I was made for luxury."

"You are still confused by the tremendous change. Any one would be in your position. But you will quickly become accustomed to it. You will be

THE HAREM FAVORITE

worthy, my darling, of the importance of your position."

"Perhaps."

"I will help you. But where will I be able to see you most conveniently? Here, at your home, at mine?"

"I am closely watched. The King is quick to anger. At present, I cannot safely receive you at Passy. Later on I expect to be less trammelled. We can see each other here if you are willing. You seem to have captivated my sister."

"I already hold her in high esteem and value her friendship highly. She will play the part of Iris for us. Do you know, my dear, who Iris was?"

"Wasn't she the messenger of the gods?"

"Yes, but chiefly when they were in love."

He took her in his arms, seeking her lips. His hands wandered. Anne, passive until then, arose with a quick movement.

"How now, sir! You claim to be my friend, and you treat me after this fashion. And my present condition must be very repugnant to you."

"Anne, my beautiful Anne, forgive me. Nothing about you could be repugnant. I have never ceased to think of you. I still love you. You are like a prolific houri, and it is vastly becoming. I had only to see you and all my desires arose again. Permit me to bend your cruel will. At Grenoble you repulsed me. But why do you cast me into despair again now?"

ON THE KING'S COUCH

He strove to clasp her once more. She disengaged herself resolutely and did not answer.

"I adore you, Anne. Are you going to refuse me happiness?"

"Ah, Chevalier, were I sure your happiness were at stake! But unfortunately it is your imagination which rises to these heights; your senses are speaking for you. Your heart is cold."

"It is fired with love for you, my angel. Never had any one moved it so deliciously!"

"If you loved me truly, you would fly from me. Think of the position I am in."

"And why, pray? Can you not be both the King's favorite and my love? Is His Majesty faithful to you? Pay him back in his own currency. Why should we renounce this matchless pleasure?"

"Pleasure! Once again it is pleasure you are seeking; all the time, everywhere. Chevalier, there are so many other women who can give you pleasure. I implore you: let us remain friends, only friends. You know how fond I am of you."

She took his hand and caressed it with her thin white fingers which contrasted so strongly with his brown Italian skin. He sensed the decisiveness beneath her gentle manner. He decided not to oppose her resistance which was no doubt a result of her condition. He yielded, not ungraciously.

"Then make one promise which will console me."

"What must I promise?"

"To make me happy after your child is born. I will be patient."

THE HAREM FAVORITE

"No, no, no. I cannot do it. I must not deceive the King. He is so kind to me—and besides, I am sure that were I to be unfaithful to him, the wheel which has elevated me to where I am, would turn and hurl both myself and my child to destruction."

"What nonsense!"

"You have made me superstitious. It is your own fault. For the sake of my son, for my own sake, I urgently beg you to forget a passing whim which cannot be satisfied without great risk and great remorse. Do not think of me except as a friend; the tenderest, the most grateful, the most devoted you have. Is it agreed? Kiss me on the cheek to seal our pact. . . . On the cheek I said, Chevalier."

"Above all I am anxious to please you, Anne. I am yours, body and soul. Nothing is so dear to me as your peace of mind, your future, your good fortune. Since you so command me, I will still my overeager heart; I will be a brother to you. I will wait submissively until you consent to call me by a sweeter name."

Anne laughed and shrugged her shoulders prettily, then took out her powder rag, and adjusted her lace bonnet.

"I must leave immediately. I have lingered too long already. Several of my lackeys must be spies, and they will be surprised at my staying so long with my sister. When will I see you again, Chevalier? To-morrow His Majesty is coming to visit me. The whole day is devoted to him. Will you be here the day after to-morrow at this time?"

ON THE KING'S COUCH

Casanova watched discreetly while she climbed into her great coach. It rumbled slowly off in the direction of Passy. Then he turned and went down the steps, one by one. He was delighted: deep in her heart Anne was unchanged. Although her body did not belong to him, he was sure of her heart. He would lead her as he chose. The project that he had conceived at Grenoble was good; now he could put it into execution. If the beautiful Romans was Pompadour's successor, why couldn't he fit into Marigny's shoes? Casanova had never been more than a distinguished vagabond, yet he felt that he had the makings of a statesman. What was there to prevent him from entering the King's council chamber one of these days? His Majesty's minister, the Chevalier de Seingalt! He was a foreigner, but Mazarin was an Italian, and Concini before him.

He went off, immersed in his dreams. Suddenly in the middle of the Rue de Montpensier, regardless of the chaises and drays, he halted; something very important had occurred to him.

"Now," he murmured, "if only the horoscope was entirely right and Anne's child is a boy!"

III

THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENTS

ANNE was stretched out languidly on a huge day-bed; the disorder in her dress spoke well for the King's ardor. Her beautiful bare arms were clasped behind her head, and her hair was tumbling down. Her almond green silk dress had slipped, uncovering her shoulders and a glimpse of her breast. Louis sat cross-legged beside her, quite happy just to look at her, his pleasure as a connoisseur mingled with the agreeable relaxation that accompanies the satisfaction of the senses.

No mistress had ever pleased him so much. None had ever been so beautiful, and his amorous career was long, and garnished with many victories. No French sovereign, not even Louis XIV, not even the Vert Galant, had ever had the whole Court at his feet, merely awaiting a sign from him. Lax social standards, the love of intrigue and the desire to see how a King differed from other men had turned Versailles into one vast harem.

But neither Madame de Mailly-Nesle, nor the Duchesse de Châteauroux, nor their three sisters who gave themselves to him one after the other, nor Madame de Beuvron, nor Madame Amelot, nor Madame de Forcalquier, nor the Princesse de Robecq,

ON THE KING'S COUCH

nor the pretty little O'Morphy, nor Madame de Cambis, nor the Comtesse d'Estrades, nor any of the young creatures whom Madame de Pompadour and Lebel had brought in turn to the little house in the Parc-aux-Cerfs in order to turn his attention from the ladies of rank who were adjudged more dangerous, had aroused his sensuality and satisfied his waning vigor as well as this simple girl.

He was enchanted by the astounding nobility of her face, by the perfection of her form which would have delighted the heart of a Pigalle or a Houdon. He was delighted by her instinctive attitude of a languorous sultana, always ready to open wide her arms.

This magnificent creature with the ingenuous soul made him feel younger, fired his blasé heart, filled for an instant the tremendous emptiness of his life, lulled to sleep for a while that invincible boredom which pursued him incessantly, at the fêtes, at the hunt, at dinner, at the Council of State. He had tried by every artifice to escape it, but his enemy had always seized him again.

When his beautiful Romans was there, although she had neither great wit nor great culture, he became not gay, for gayety was never part of his nature, but happy; happy in sensing rest and peace and an intimate contentment which surprised him. And this happiness was not dimmed by habit. Ever since Anne had entered into the King's good graces this feeling had grown, was still growing.

The little salon was paneled in natural oak,

THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENTS

delicately carved and pierced and without gilding; around the tops of the doors and windows, pastoral scenes paled into soft suggestions of color. The twenty thousand inhabitants of the colossal palace rushed noisily about outside, but within this sacred sanctuary the quiet was like velvet. The King and his mistress were silent.

She, too, was enjoying a delightful languor that made her limbs feel giddy although her head was calm. She turned towards Louis and smiled at him with tender abandon.

Her feelings for the King were complicated: there was respect and affection; mostly, in all probability, a profound wonder which she had felt when first she came into favor and which had never left her. She scarcely realized her lord's age. She was fascinated by the nuances of his courtesy, his subtle gallantry, the air of dignity which he maintained in the most familiar circumstances. And ever since the birth of her son, she had been moved by a deep-seated ambition: to assure a princely future for the child. For Anne had actually borne the King a son. The horoscope had been right in every particular. Louis-Aimé de Bourbon reposed in his luxurious, semi-royal crib, the only one of Louis's children to be named after him. Her maternal ambitions bound Anne very strongly to the sovereign, and gradually came to dominate her other feelings. But the fact remained that her lover was not displeasing to her.

Although Louis XV had been born of deformed parents, he had been France's most handsome king,

ON THE KING'S COUCH

and at the age of fifty-three he was still a very distinguished man. His skin still had that amber light which Peter the Great had admired in the days of the Regency when he had seen Louis as a child. Eyebrows that were very dark and very regular, arched over large black eyes whose motionless pupils gave him a startled look. His aquiline nose was commencing to curve in; his jowls were heavy. But the mouth like a cherry, that mouth that had been admired so many times, desired so many times, was still firm and crimson. A mole on his chin which looked rather like a beauty-spot, lent an almost feminine charm to his face.

The fire glowed in the marble fireplace which was topped by a fragile Saxony-ware clock. Suddenly the King rose lightly to his feet and placed a log on the andirons with his own hands. He had always been surrounded by a swarm of servants, so he adored waiting on himself. He did not return to Anne's side, but sank into the cushions of a deep armchair and began caressing Soliman who slept curled upon the carpet, before the fire. Soliman was a splendid white Angora cat. He was a present from the Comte de Vergennes, the ambassador to Constantinople. De Vergennes had risen into the King's high esteem as a result of this gift, and was seriously contemplating a ministry. Soliman was an example of a rare species, reserved, so they said, for the Sultan. Louis was greatly attached to him and would allow no one else to minister to his wants. Anne never went near him.

THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENTS

She loathed cats, above all this one of which the King was so fond.

"Sometimes, my own," the King was wont to say, "I am convinced that you are jealous of my cat."

She would admit it. She was unused to the ways of the world, so she was frank.

Suddenly Louis stopped petting Soliman. Something had occurred to him:

"Tell me, my own."

"Sire?"

"Do you know what a little bird has told me?"

"A little bird? My dear master, that, I believe, is the way you refer to Monsieur de Sartine?"

Louis blushed. Even at his age he changed color easily. It was a trait he had inherited from his mother, the Duchesse de Bourgogne, who always turned crimson at the slightest thing. Anne continued:

"I don't like that man. He is so tall and thin and pale. Well, what did he tell you? A great many things that don't concern me, I am certain."

"You are mistaken, my love. A little bird—and it is not Monsieur de Sartine this time—assured me that you went to the Comédie Française yesterday."

"And what is the harm in that, Sire?"

"No harm," said Louis good-naturedly. "And yet, my own, it would be preferable if you did not appear in the theater for some time yet. I don't like you to be conspicuous. Yesterday you were not even masked."

"Sire, if I had been, I would have been the only

ON THE KING'S COUCH

person at the Comédie with my face concealed. I would have been much more conspicuous. That is all very well at the opera. Besides, no one saw me or spoke to me."

"Some one saw you since I heard about it."

She fixed her large eyes upon him and said with a kind of violence:

"It would be better if your police spent more of its time looking for thieves."

"Here, here, my dear," said the King reproachfully. His tone was friendly, but tinged with hauteur. "That is no way to address a King."

He was still very careful to preserve his dignity. In his old age, he was destined to forget his pride in Dubarry's arms. But at this period he seldom forgot that he was a ruler.

Anne turned a little pale.

"Excuse me, Sire," she murmured.

It occurred to her to ask his forgiveness with some graceful little phrase: to say, I never think of you as a King any more, but only as a friend. Louis would have been flattered. Casanova was constantly telling her that she ought to be more tender and playful with the King; he was so susceptible that he would grant her every request. All this occurred to her, but she was timid, and the words would not come. All she could manage was that curt, awkward "Excuse me."

"You are mistaken," said Louis for the second time. "Poor Sartine has nothing to do with this."

And he began to poke the fire with the exquisite

THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENTS

tongs which Caffieri had chiseled for him. He loved to tend a fire, to heap up the coals and move about the logs.

"Sire," said Anne. "I know that there are a great many people in the palace who are jealous of me. They are envious of me because I am high in your favor, and their one thought is to lower me in your estimation. I went to the Comédie with my sister to see *l'Orphelin de la Chine* because I had never seen the famous Lekain. It was a harmless escapade, and I have so few amusements. You do not allow me to see anything of society—"

"I prefer that you should not."

"I am not received at Court—"

"You will be in time, my sweet. Be patient. We must wait a little longer before presenting you to the Queen. She has heard of you. She might be resentful. I don't want to have to listen to her remonstrances. I hear enough complaints in Parliament."

He laughed his silent laugh: it was never more than a protracted smile, completely joyless.

"I am amused by the fashionable world, I like to see it. It is all so new to me. I am only a parvenue, my dear master."

"I know it, my darling," said the King with imperceptible irony. This was the only thing he regretted about his beautiful mistress. He could not help comparing her with the Marquise, and measuring the disturbing difference which would always separate them. In spite of her origin, the latter, thanks to flawless instincts and constant study, had

ON THE KING'S COUCH

become a very elegant woman. Her grace was exquisite, her manner was refined, her bearing perfect. Anne was infinitely more beautiful; younger, more loving; yet she would probably always remain a commoner. And the King, who was so aristocratic, so permeated with a consciousness of his rank, sometimes felt when he was with Anne that he was becoming bourgeois.

"But tell me," he went on, "you were not alone with Madame Varnier at the Comédie?"

She repressed a slight tremor. Should she lie to him? She felt certain that the King had information on this point. And besides it was Anne's nature to be stubborn.

"A friend was with us, Monsieur le Chevalier de Casanova."

"Casanova? Who is this man? I have been informed that you see him quite often."

"Sire, I knew him when I was in Grenoble. He persuaded my family to let me come to Paris. And so I owe it to him that I am with you. I sometimes meet him at my sister's house. I have an idea that he is on exceedingly good terms with her. He has a way of talking that is fascinating—"

"Isn't he a sort of magician?"

"I believe that he is very adept in the secret arts, my dear lord. He sometimes refers to his researches—He predicts the future in an amazing manner—"

She stopped. Casanova had advised her never to refer to the oracle, lest her enemies manage to represent

THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENTS

it as a careful maneuver to deceive the King. Then as Louis seemed interested, she added:

"If it will amuse you, Sire, I will immediately bid him come and be presented to Your Majesty the next time you come to Passy."

"No, no, not another sorcerer," said the King hastily. "I already have the pleasure of knowing Saint-Germain—and my father confessor will not hear of these sacrilegious sports."

He stopped and took a few steps about the room. Seated on the sofa, Anne was amusing herself by unraveling a tassel. Louis came over to her with a very serious expression.

"Are you pious, my own? Do those pretty lips say their prayers every morning and evening?"

Anne hesitated in surprise. Like most people, she had fallen into a kind of indifference and no longer thought of God.

"What, you don't say them?"

The royal voice, very clear and well-modulated, had become almost severe.

"Certainly, Sire, excuse me, I say my Pater and my Ave every day."

"I am glad to hear it," said the King in a relieved tone. "I realize that on account of our relations you cannot approach the sacraments. But you should pray and exercise contrition. So should I, for that matter. For, do you realize that together we commit very agreeable but very serious sins?"

He hesitated a moment, and then added:

"If you wish to please me and show that you love

ON THE KING'S COUCH

me, you will say one more Ave for me after this."

"I willingly promise to do it, my dear lord."

He bent over and kissed Anne lovingly.

"How is Louis-Aimé? Is he a good boy?"

A luminous smile came over the young woman's face. Her son! The King's child, but above all her own. She could have talked about him for hours.

"Not very good, just now," she said. "He is cutting his teeth. He is nearly fifteen months old; it is just the right time. But otherwise he is in the best of health and looks more like Your Majesty every day. Don't you notice it yourself?"

"It is quite true that he takes after me," answered Louis, not without a certain amount of vanity, "he has my eyes and mouth."

"And your nose, Sire."

"Yes, I must admit his nose, too, is like mine. He richly deserves the name of Bourbon."

"People are constantly remarking upon him in the Bois de Boulogne when I take him there for an airing in the afternoon."

"If he should ever be ill, let me know immediately and I will send Quesnay."

"He is one of the Marquise's friends," said Anne in an uncertain tone.

"He is a fine scholar and an honorable man. I have a great deal of confidence in him."

"I certainly hope I shall never need him," she sighed. "It is not his health that worries me."

"What is worrying you, my own?"

THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENTS

"The future, my dear lord, his future and mine. If you should tire of me, what would become of us?"

"You need not worry about it. Haven't I proved to your satisfaction that I cannot get along without you?"

She shook her lovely head sadly.

"Tell me what you want."

"Your Majesty knows very well."

Again she sighed deeply.

"Yes, you have already told me: the legitimization of Louis-Aimé. It is impossible—for the present, that is. As long as the Queen is there—"

"But the children of Madame de Montespan and of Mademoiselle de la Vallière were declared legitimate during the lifetime of Marie-Thérèse."

The King's Olympian brow became slightly clouded.

"I did not realize that you were such a student of history. You are improving your mind, I see. It is quite true that my forefather was guilty of that weakness, but it is far from being the most praiseworthy action of that great Prince, God rest his soul." (He crossed himself.) "He might have waited."

"He did not want to, Sire—"

"Who has been putting these ideas in your head?" asked the King discontentedly. "You are becoming very exacting, my sweet. You used to be pleased with so little. Some one has been giving you bad advice."

"I see no one, Sire."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"You see your sister. You see her far too much according to my way of thinking. She is a busy-body, a gambler, a woman of bad reputation."

"Sire, I have told that her home life has not been at all happy. But she does not deserve your re-criminations. She is filled with the greatest respect for Your Majesty."

And as her master's gaze, fastened upon her face grew more tender, she took courage and continued quite firmly:

"I have never asked for anything for myself; never, dear lord. You once offered me the title of Marquise: I refused to accept it."

"And it was very foolish of you, my sweetest friend. To me, the title of Marquise de Vaujours was a fitting step towards a more elevated rank. Everything takes time, you know. I often think of you and Louis-Aimé. I will give both of you a position that will satisfy you."

"Ah, Sire, how grateful I will be to Your Majesty."

"You should have more faith in me, in my affection for the child; for you, in fact. It hurts me very much when you doubt my intentions. If you are good and obedient your lot will be a great deal more glorious than any you could imagine."

"Dear master, my present lot quite satisfies me. I want nothing better, if only you would establish my son's position."

The King's irritation had subsided, but Anne's last words worried him.

THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENTS

"I understand," he said slowly. "In case that I should disappear."

"Oh, Sire, what a horrible idea. I had never dreamed of such a frightful thing. But I am so afraid my lord will cease to have the same regard for his servant."

The King remained in somber silence for a moment. Then he said:

"I am going to ask you a question, my own. Promise that you will answer sincerely."

"Of course, my dearest lord."

"Do you think that I have still a long time to live?"

She shuddered.

"But, Sire, you are still a young man. Your health is wonderful. You tire out your pages when you hunt, and many of them—"

She appeared confused.

"Go on, go on. What were you going to say?"

"And many of them, Sire, would not be as young in love."

He kissed her shoulder and breast with grateful ardor.

"You make me feel better, you really make me feel better— You know, I often have gloomy ideas. The thought of death is constantly recurring to me. The thought of giving an account to my Maker, too. I have doubtless not lived as I should; I have yielded too often to the lure of the flesh. Shall I have time to change my ways and repent? That is my chief anxiety, to such an extent that sometimes I am

ON THE KING'S COUCH

tempted to renounce everything, everything I love, and retire into a monastery to expiate—”

“Banish these somber thoughts, Sire,” interrupted Anne in terror. “You have many enjoyable years before you. Your people adore you. They call you *Bien-Aimé*.”

“My people, hm, I am not so sure. There have been great changes. That dreadful war which lasted seven years wearied them and embittered them.”

“They still venerate you, dear lord. But they do not like some of the people about you. That is why they are murmuring, make no mistake.”

“No politics, my own, no politics! You know very well that I don’t want you to talk State with me.”

“It is all very well for Madame de Pompadour.”

“The Marquise? Yes. What do you expect her to do now? She is only a friend to me these days. She no longer has love; one must leave her something.”

“To enable her to push her creatures, empty the treasury and compromise the honor of your reign,” said Anne scornfully.

“Here, here,” said the King, putting his hand over her mouth. “Hush, my darling, we are not here together to discuss the merits of the Marquise.”

“Yes, Sire, unfortunately I realize that you consider the Marquise worthier of your confidence—”

“What do you mean to imply by that? The Marquise knows all about the workings of the government—more than I do in some cases. It is quite natural; she has been at Court for seventeen years.

She gives me very good advice. She has an excellent memory, and a great deal of intelligence and tact. And then she is so well acquainted with all my tastes and habits. We differ only on the question of religion. But do not be jealous of her, my angel," he said, stroking the long black hair which hung down to Anne's waist. "My affection for you is much deeper, and always will be."

"Dear lord, it always delights me when you say that. I desire above all to retain your love."

"If you only knew what a relaxation it was for me to be here, without plans, without my usual troublesome thoughts about the war, the navy, the diplomatic ambushes which my loving brother Frederick of Prussia may be arranging for me, the treachery of England or the rash actions of Marie-Thérèse, who is going to set Europe on fire sooner or later in order to wreak her spiteful vengeance. I grow younger every minute I am at your side, for I am able to forget my worries and my ministers."

He repeated disdainfully:

"My ministers!"

"Why, Sire," said Anne, sitting up and looking interested. "Are you no longer satisfied with Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul?"

"Choiseul? He is just like all the others. He promises the most wonderful things imaginable. But nothing is ever accomplished; everything goes along in the same old way. You have to begin all over again. After all, what does it matter? Let them

ON THE KING'S COUCH

run the government if it amuses them. *Après moi le deluge—*"

He ran his hand over his brow as if to brush away a shadow. Then he went over and started drumming on the yellow window panes. Outside, the barren expanse of marble was bathed in a chill twilight.

Some one came and tapped at the door. Louis withdrew the bolt, and Lebel with his soft white face slipped in. With silent steps the valet brought in the tapers and placed them about the room. As he was about to leave he whispered to the King:

"Monsieur le Duc de Gontaut is here, Sire."

"Gontaut? What does he want?"

He was the only man at court for whom Louis had any affection. He was neither witty nor imposing, but he had a good heart, he was courteous, gay, and faithful. When the Duchesse de Châteauroux, Louis's first acknowledged mistress, was dying, he had lavished the most tender care upon her. Louis had never forgotten it. Since then, the Duke had rallied to Pompadour's beribboned standard. He spent every moment with the reigning favorite. He chatted with her while she dressed, went with her on all her journeys to Bellevue, to l'Ermitage, to Choisy; he was her factotum, almost her servant.

"Madame la Marquise," said Lebel, "sent him to inquire whether Your Majesty would favor her with your presence this evening at supper."

"Shh!" said Louis, raising his finger to his lips.

He looked at Anne.

She lay on the couch, quite unconscious of Lebel,

THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENTS

half exposed in her filmy dress, in the most languorous of attitudes. One rosy tipped breast had escaped from her bodice. A long slender leg was quite uncovered. The soft light of the candles gilded her ivory shoulders and supple throat. She was so beautiful that the King was quite incensed at the Marquise's request that he should join her.

"The Marquise bores me," he said harshly. "Why does she send Gontaut to disturb me? I don't care for that. Lebel, tell the Duc not to count on me; I am busy to-day. Bring me a dainty supper. In an hour we will dine here."

The valet bowed and disappeared. Louis shot the bolt carefully. Then he sat down close beside Anne. She twined her lovely bare arms about him with a triumphant smile.

IV

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON, MARQUISE DE POMPADOUR

THEY are all there, her boon companions, her dear friends; gathered together in the great assembly room on the ground floor, just below the Royal apartments. The Marquise is usually there; always beautifully attired, always waiting for a possible visit from the King. About her are her spinet, her palette, her engraving tools, and her gewgaws, but she sits looking out over the dazzling vista of the gardens.

Choiseul, who is her lover, although their galantries are rare now, has not yet arrived. But the little Maréchale de Mirepoix is there; her physician, Doctor Quesnay, is there; Gontaut and Marigny are there, and her ally, Monsieur de Sartine.

Five o'clock already, and the King has not arrived. Perhaps he will not come to-day. The favorite has been seeing him less frequently lately. The council, audiences, the hunt, are detaining him. Maybe other cares as well. Madame de Pompadour seems weary. She has put on more rouge than usual—and once she prided herself on never using it. But her cheeks are hollow, her gaze feverish.

She is dressed in one of those supremely elegant *négligées* which she invented herself. They are a

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON

sensation all over Europe and are called "robes à la Pompadour." It is a kind of Oriental dress, snug about the neck, but open over the breast; it is tight at the hips but flows out over a panniered skirt. It emphasizes the grace of the figure which it pretends to conceal.

But even in an old rose costume with white moire furbelows, the Marquise looks her age. She is seated in an armchair, resting her head against the high back, and she hardly smiles; the eternal smile is gone. What is the use? The King has not come. No one is present but tried and true friends, whose positions at court are closely related to hers. Naturally they share her worries.

"Doctor, dear doctor," says she to old Quesnay, pulling him by the sleeve. "I am in need of you. I am not very well these days. I am always tired, I feel sick, I am never hungry. Can't you produce some wonderful elixir to revive me? My dear Quesnay, bring me to life again."

"An elixir?" asks Quesnay in a surly voice, shaking his great grim head, which his huge wig exaggerates still more. "I don't know of any, Madame. But if you are willing to follow my advice, I have an excellent recipe that will give you perfect health."

"What is it?" demands the Maréchale in her deep, masculine voice, stretching out her scrawny neck. "I have the vapors, too."

The others gather around curiously.

"You can all apply this remedy. Go out of your stuffy rooms, where there are too many perfumes,

ON THE KING'S COUCH

too much furniture, too many draperies; stay in the open air, walk, exercise your muscles and you will have huge appetites, you will digest perfectly and your gloomy thoughts will vanish."

Their faces fall. Madame de Pompadour pouts.

"You jest, doctor. How could I follow such a prescription when the king wants me to be ready at any time to receive him, to listen to him, to amuse him—he, the most *unamusable* man in the world. Every one envies me, and I am the most miserable of creatures. What a profession!"

She looks around vaguely; she is apparently indifferent to the luxury which surrounds her. It is an unheard-of luxury, but all her possessions are so delicately made that the effect is one of noble elegance. She used the most subtle art of the greatest artists of the time to furnish her drawing-room. Verbeck carved the wainscoting where the three towers of Pompadour's crest alternate with amorous devices. Lancret, Boucher, Pater, and Vanello painted these doors and pier-glasses; Lepaute and Gouthière chiseled these candelabra, this clock, these jars of silver, gilt and vermilion that breathe an odor of musk and ambergris through their thousand apertures.

The apartments of the royal family are shabby in comparison with this huge room paneled in heavy gray silk embroidered with blue and yellow flowers. The curtains are of rosy silk, the chairs are covered with Gobelins; a Persian carpet half conceals the rose-wood floor, the great screen is of golden lacquer, each

piece of rare marqueterie has cost a fortune; all this during a period when the treasury is empty and the army lacks shoes and even bread.

On the consoles, on the tables, on the cabinets are vases: vases of Sèvres, and Chinese and Japanese porcelains. They are filled with a profusion of flowers. Carnation, gladiolus, camellia, tuberose, jasmine, fraxinella, and above all roses, roses of every kind and color. A huge sea-green bowl on the mantel is filled with whole branches of *bouquet de mariée* that spill out on to the floor in a snowy cascade.

Madame de Pompadour adores flowers. It is probably the one thing in the world she really loves; even more than art; and she is a notable connoisseur.

"What a miserable profession I follow," she repeats.

Quesnay rests his chin on his cane. The head is a crow's beak, and it is his special privilege never to be without it. "Well, then," he says, "give up this arduous profession; leave the Court, live your own life—you will be happier."

Every one looks reproachfully at the author of this bad advice. Imagine suggesting that the favorite leave Court!

The Marquise makes a weary gesture. "I am no longer able to. I know that I am inhaling a kind of poison here, but that poison has become necessary to my very existence. What would there be to interest me anywhere else? And how could I leave my friends?"

"No, Marquise," says Gontaut, kissing her hand.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"The doctor is joking. You are a little nervous. All you need is rest. You will be yourself again by supper time."

"You do not know how terrible my life has become. Not even you, my dear Duke. It is the same struggle every day—to keep the King."

"The King?" says Marigny. "He spoke of you last evening at the disrobing ceremony in the most affectionate terms."

"He proves his friendship for you in a thousand ways," says the Maréchale.

"You seem completely unacquainted with his character. If he were planning to exile me to-morrow, he would be quite capable of being extremely pleasant to me to-day. His education has made it natural for him to dissimulate. If it had not been for the Bishop of Fréjus he would have remained frank and open."

"Nevertheless," answers the Maréchale, "I would fear a change in the King a great deal more if he were crusty."

"Are you anxious over His Majesty's—distractions?" asks Gontaut.

The Marquise answers in a dry, feverish voice:

"Distractions, you call them! Good heavens, he can have as many as he likes. It is absolutely no matter to me. Those tactless, stupid little girls in the Parc-aux-Cerfs will never take him away from me. He tires easily of them and comes back to me. But just now, there are others—"

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON

She stops a moment, deep in thought; then lets fall the name that is in every mind:

"There is Mademoiselle de Romans."

All of them protest loudly except Monsieur de Sartine, who remains quietly in his corner. What can she fear from some one who has no influence at Court and no coterie in the city? It is a whim of the King's and it will pass like the others. The only amazing thing is that she has lasted two and a half years.

"You are sadly deceived, or you are trying to deceive me," says Madame de Pompadour. "In a friendly way, I am sure. But it is all very clear to me. Mademoiselle de Romans is not like his usual mistresses. She is beautiful and ambitious. She has a child to work for. She is dangerous."

And she adds:

"All the more dangerous since the King is hiding his fondness for her from me. If he would tell me about it, it would be another matter entirely. As you well know, he has confided in me about most of his amours. I have often facilitated them or brought them to an end at his request. But he has never breathed a word to me about Mademoiselle de Romans, and all I know about their affair is what I have learned through the confidences of my friends or the allusions of my enemies."

"Mademoiselle de Romans is not the first inamorata of the King," says the Duc de Gontaut.

"There have been many others, Marquise, and we

ON THE KING'S COUCH

have seen them all vanish like so many puffs of smoke."

"Of course, I triumphed easily over Madame de Coslin; she was sent away like a servant. I triumphed over the O'Morphy girl, Madame de Forcalquier and Madame de Lauraguais. But this Romans woman is stronger than the others. She has a son. I shall not overcome that obstacle, I am afraid. But hush—"

Her quick ear has discerned a noise on the staircase.

The door opens, and the Duc de Choiseul comes in. He bows to the assembled circle, and going quickly over to the Marquise, kisses both her hands. A glance from Madame de Pompadour keeps the Prime Minister at her side. The others withdraw discreetly. Marigny goes over to the spinet and plays a few arpeggios. Gontaut and the little Maréchale retire into an embrasure and begin to admire the park. Sartine and Quesnay start an animated discussion on taxation. In the meantime the favorite asks Choiseul in a low voice:

"Have you seen him? What was he doing yesterday?"

"He spent the afternoon at Passy. I saw him in the morning for about a quarter of an hour; I needed some signatures. To-day he is shut up in his own apartments and I have been unable to speak to him. He came to the door and wanted to know if my business was important."

"He was with the young lady?"

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON

The Marquise's gray eyes gleam with the cold light of aquamarines.

"No, my dear, his fingers were ink-stained. I think he must have been working on his secret correspondence. He must have been with Tercier."

Very often, after he has been to call on his daughters, lunched with them, and heard mass, Louis XV dismisses his servants and works by himself at his desk. He corresponds with the King of Spain, the Bourbon Princes and the Italian princes. Sometimes he writes to the Cardinal of Tencin, and above all, to the Comte de Broglie and the Abbé, his brother. Under his personal orders, they carry on a concealed diplomacy quite apart from the official machinations, called "The King's Secrets." It is the pet aversion of Choiseul, who is Minister of Foreign Affairs. Naturally Madame de Pompadour, his ally, shares this feeling. They have done everything they could think of to pry into this secret, even to hiring the services of the de Broglies, the agents and the secretaries. But Louis, with extraordinary craft and skill, has always managed to keep them in the dark.

"I really prefer that," says the Marquise in a relieved tone. "What has happened about the negotiations with Vienna?"

"Kaunitz is unwilling to give in about anything. Just the same, I think that we will succeed in the end."

"And the trouble with the Jesuits?"

"It will soon be settled. The King has finally consented. I am drawing up a paper for him to sign.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

The followers of Ignatius will be forced to separate and live as laymen, or else leave France."

"At last I have broken those insolent priests," she mutters between clenched teeth. "But have you any news from Spain?"

"Yes, d'Aranda wrote to me quite recently. I will bring you his letter. He has adopted our views. The band of the Jesuits will receive a double blow. They will be attacked simultaneously from both sides of the Alps. Everything is going nicely."

This optimism reminds the favorite of her troubles.

"How like a man. You are perfectly satisfied, and you and I may be sent away any minute."

Choiseul's clever eyes open wide.

"Why should we be sent away? What do you mean?"

"I mean that the Romans woman's influence is growing every day. I mean that the King neglects me continually and spends more and more time with her. I mean that they are talking of giving her son a title, and making him a prince of the blood."

"Things have not come to such a pass," says Choiseul calmly.

"Sartine would have warned me. Come over here, Monsieur de Sartine."

"All of you come," adds the Marquise. "You may listen. We were talking about Mademoiselle, whom we were discussing before the Duke came in."

"Is there any news on that subject, my dear Sartine?" asks the Prime Minister.

"If there were, Madame would already be in-

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON

formed," answers the Police Lieutenant, "and you, too, Monsieur le Duc. The situation has not changed, and I do not believe the rumors that are current about the legitimization of her son. I do not believe this," he repeated, stressing his words, "for the time being."

"I don't, either," says the tactful Gontaut.

"You are wrong to torment yourself, my darling," says the Maréchale, furtively adjusting one of her moleskin eye-brows which had come unglued.

"Since Madame permits me to give my opinion," continues Sartine composedly, "I am at liberty to say that Mademoiselle de Romans is neither witty, nor endowed with those graces which are so pleasing to the King. She should not be cause for much alarm, were it not for some one behind her who is directing her steps and dictating her sentiments."

"Yes, her sister, the Varnier woman," says Madame de Pompadour, "the one who gambles."

"Her sister doesn't count. There is a man supporting Mademoiselle de Romans—a friend or a lover as you will—a determined, discerning, active, resolute, redoubtable man."

"Who is it?" asks Gontaut and the Maréchale with one accord.

"A certain Casanova—"

"What," asks Madame de Mirepoix scornfully, "the Venetian? Who is the man?"

"An adventurer," says Quesnay; "he was introduced to me. A combination of hero of romance and brigand."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"That tall, graceful Italian with the fiery eyes that I received at the Opera some time ago?" asks the Marquise slowly, unable to hide a little shudder. "I have seen him twice since. Although he has always been very polite, he has always disturbed me—"

"And do you think, Monsieur," asks Marigny, "that this Casanova is her lover?"

"I have no way of telling," answers that official, "although he may be only a friend, he may have all the more influence over her. I have learned from the chatter of Madame Varnier that it is due to him that Mademoiselle de Romans came to Paris. As soon as he heard that she was in favor he hastened to seek her out again. Ever since, her attitude has been different; she had always been very discreet, but now she seems to have views concerning a suitable position for herself."

"If we were to tell the King," said Gontaut, "he would be disgusted with her."

"It is a very risky thing to do," replies Monsieur de Choiseul. "The King doesn't trust any one. What proof have we?"

"I know another way," says Sartine. "We can frighten Mademoiselle de Romans and force her to be more modest in her demands by depriving her of her counselor. Nothing would be easier than to place this Venetian in a difficult position. He looks to me for all the world like a rascal. I know a few questionable things about his past. He lives at a fiendish pace, always gaming or playing fast and loose with women. He is an unprincipled libertine. He per-

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON

forms feats of magic with the old Marquise d'Urfé. That is cause enough, I believe, to throw him into one of the State Prisons."

"Carefully, Monsieur, carefully," says Madame de Pompadour. "You are proposing an open attack. The Romans woman will have only one thought: revenge. And she will find plenty of help."

"Where?" says Gontaut. "She sees no one."

"Where? Why, everywhere," says the Marquise rising. "So many people detest me. Have you forgotten that I receive ten wretched libels a day, that I am insulted every time I go to Paris, that I am accused of being the cause of the King's indolence, of his unfortunate policies, of the ruin of his finances, of the downfall of the monarchy? Yesterday, I found another filthy quatrain in my coach. See here, Monsieur de Sartine; I kept it to show to you. Read it aloud, I beg you."

Sartine deciphers the scrawl, reading in an embarrassed voice:

*"Poisson is a leech and the daughter of a leech,
She fastens her clutches on all that she can reach,
She sits in her palace, that shameless, fearless wench,
A scandal to the King and a tyrant to the French."*

"Disgraceful, odious!" says the Maréchale.

"That's abominable!" cries Choiseul.

"What little I have, I have to pay for very dearly," says the Marquise, wiping away a crocodile tear.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"How can I remain calm and watch over my health when I am tormented this way?"

"I think I know who wrote this verse," says the Police Lieutenant. "It was going around town recently. It was attributed to the Chevalier de Ressayguier."

"Ressayguier?" says Madame de Pompadour. "It is true that he is not fond of me. But he is a Knight of Malta, and an officer of the King's guard. I cannot believe that he would lend himself to such a scurrilous attack."

"We shall see," says Choiseul. "Do not worry about this miserable thing any longer, Marquise. And you, Sartine, have de Ressayguier's house searched tomorrow while he is away. If you find any trace of this quatrain—a rough draft, or a copy, let me know. He will pay for it very dearly."

"You are a good friend, Duke," says the Marquise, holding out her hand to her defender. "But, alas, there are other insults that even you, with your enormous power, would be unable to avenge. You know how the Queen receives me with devout hauteur. Her daughters go even farther. Do you know what they call me when they speak of me among themselves?"

"No," says every one in turn, except Sartine, who smiles quietly.

"*Mother whore*. The King knows it and says nothing. That is what frightens me. If only I were younger, if I still had some hold over him. That is why my position is so feeble."

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON

The rest are silent. The Marquise is right. For the last ten years she has been no more than the superintendent of the King's pleasures. To be sure, he always confided in her. But is her influence strong enough to prevail against a genuine passion?

The little Maréchale conceals a resolute heart beneath her frail exterior.

"Your position is strong," she says, "because it is long established. Princes are just like other men: they are creatures of habit. I won't say that the King loves you more than the Romans woman. If she could be transported here by the touch of some magic wand, if she should ask him to supper this evening, and if she were thoroughly acquainted with his tastes, I will admit that you might have reason to tremble. But the King has been coming in and out of your door for so many years. He knows your apartment so well, your surroundings, your mannerisms; you understand him so well. He is at ease with you, he is never afraid of boring you. He has such a timid nature, how can you expect him to uproot himself all of a sudden, and regale the public with a new mistress and another establishment? No, no, you have nothing to fear, provided that you do not lose courage."

"Our charming Maréchale is right," says Monsieur de Choiseul. "His Majesty is deeply attached to you. His family may look down upon you; they do not count. It has not deterred him from imposing you upon the Queen, and were you to complain of their insolence, Mesdames would be treated to a per-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

empty lecture. At a pinch, our King is quite capable of showing that he is the master."

"My friends, I am grateful to you; you give me courage. But let this be understood: I do not want any talk or disturbance. The King loves peace above all. To keep him, one must learn to please him. And the way to please is by being moderate, agreeable, and easily contented. No reproaches, no scenes; that would be the best way to lose him. I am not going to adopt a policy of violence towards Mademoiselle de Romans. I shall wait. After all, there is always the possibility of our coming to an agreement. This fellow Casanova probably wants a position, money. What do you think, Duke?"

"He asked to be recommended to me for foreign missions. He has also proposed a reorganization of finances. Until now I have always refused to see him."

"That was a mistake. You should have spoken to me about him. Even a great politician like you, still has something to learn from a woman, Monsieur le Duc. When you meet an adversary, first learn what his objective is. If you can do it without any risk, crush him. If you can't, buy him off. Will you do me a favor?"

"I am your humble servant, my dear friend. I will even do things that I personally disapprove of."

"That is the way I like my friends to treat me. Find Monsieur de Casanova at once and offer him an interesting mission. Offer to pay him well, and

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON

promise him an important position when he returns."

The Prime Minister thinks for a moment.

"I can send him to London. He can seemingly act as assistant to our ambassador, Monsieur de Guerchy, and actually keep an eye on the Chevalier d'Eon, the King's agent."

"There we have it. He will be kept at a good distance from the Romans woman. And then, it will be easier to follow his movements when he is in London. Do that, my dear, and I will be greatly obliged to you. As for the young lady, I have a plan. We will talk it over, Maréchale," she said, turning towards the Duchesse de Mirepoix.

Choiseul smiles charmingly:

"You are our best diplomat, my dear."

"When the Duc de Choiseul says that, it is a great compliment. Doubtless, I do not deserve it. But I shall certainly do my best to retain your good opinion."

The door opens again. Two young women come in, arm in arm: the Countess d'Esparbes, and Madame d'Amblimont.

"Here are our little kittens," cries the sprightly Marquise. "Everything we are discussing would be Greek to them. Gentlemen, turn from these serious subjects. Doctor, abandon your discussion of political economy and try your skill at light verse. Duke, cease maintaining the equilibrium of Europe and compose some songs for us, and poor, dear Gontaut, try to be lively for once."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

Madame d'Esparbes, the Marquise's cousin, is very tiny, very pretty, with a piquant little face, and a small turned up nose. She is the wildest, the most abandoned creature imaginable. Every nobleman in Court who wanted her has had her for the asking. Madame de Pompadour, who knows her extremely well and sometimes calls her little slut, was not in the least offended when the King's turn came. Louis once said jestingly to the Countess:

"Have you slept with all my subjects?"

"Not all of them, Sire. I have not had the time."

"With the Duc de Choiseul?"

"Sire, he is so powerful—"

"With Richelieu?"

"He is so witty—"

"With Monville?"

"He has such a well turned leg—"

"Well, but how about d'Aumont, who has none of those qualities?"

"Sire, he is so devoted to Your Majesty!"

The King roared. His affair with the Countess was a passing whim. But her prompt retorts amuse him. She is present at all the private suppers.

Madame d'Amblimont is less frivolous. As a loyal friend of the Marquise, she refused to yield to the King's advances. He rapidly consoled himself and does not hold it against her. She is slim and rather tall, with fine features. But she is very near-sighted and commits countless amusing blunders. Madame de Pompadour is very fond of her.

The newcomers kiss the Marquise effusively, quarreling over the honor of saluting her cheeks, her brow. The little Maréchale, in the throes of jealousy, bites her gay lips.

"Here, here," says Madame de Pompadour, looking at herself in her hand mirror, "your playfulness has left me totally bereft of powder. Du Hausset, come and help me out! These wretches have spoiled all your work."

With a discreet line here, and a flip of the powder puff there, the first waiting woman, a silent and influential person, restores the harmonious effect. Just in time. The great doors turn on their hinges. The herald in the antechamber strikes the floor with his baton:

"The King!"

At last! Every face lights up. The favorite suddenly looks years younger. Her eyes sparkle, her mouth curls into a charming smile.

As soon as they have recovered from their deep reverences, they bustle about him, but Louis XV, with a gracious wave of the hand, brushes aside this useless adulation.

"Be seated, Mesdames. And you, Messieurs, do not stand on formality. We are only friends here."

Even in this congenial society, the King's voice is measured and dignified. Louis XIV was not more stately although Louis XV smiles more frequently. The Grand Monarque has remained his model. But his great ancestor believed in the noble importance of

ON THE KING'S COUCH

his position; his grandson, who is certainly more intelligent, considers it no more than a pastime.

"How are you, my dear? I am delighted to see you. As you can well imagine, I have been extraordinarily busy."

How amiable he is to-day, thinks the Marquise. Can he be hiding something?

"But what were you doing here while I was suffering from boredom? I wager that you were enjoying yourselves. Pray go on, and let me amuse myself with you."

"Sire," says Madame de Pompadour, in her most caressing tones, "Your Majesty's absence deprived us of all pleasure. Even the Maréchale had the vapors." She made a sign to Marigny. "My brother was just going over to the clavichord to sing something to cheer us."

"Do not change your plans for me. Marquis, I will be delighted to hear you sing."

Marigny bows.

He is a good musician; he has a deep, intelligent interest in the arts. He sits down heavily on the piano bench. Formerly he was one of the handsomest men at court, but in the last two or three years he has grown very stout.

A few chords. He sings:

*"Un fonds de tristesse
Pénètre mon cœur.
Ma délicatesse
Cause mon malheur.*

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON

*J'ai sujet de craindre
Et de m'affliger,
Assez pour me plaindre,
Trop peu pour changer."*

His voice is sweet, with a tender gravity. The King keeps time with one finger.

"That is very pretty," says Louis XV when Marigny rises and bows to him. "But are you really in love, Marquis? I thought that those weaknesses were foreign to you. This is a tremendous change from your buildings and paintings."

Marigny blushes. The King is delighted. Here is some one more diffident than he.

"I think, Sire," says Madame de Pompadour, "that my brother cherishes tender sentiments towards the daughter of the Spanish ambassador. In spite of all my urging he refuses to get married."

"I don't see any connection. One can marry and find love elsewhere. I know examples of this."

"Forgive Monsieur de Marigny, Sire," says the Marquise with her tinkling laugh, which seems almost unstudied. "He is not a philosopher."

The King is struck by this word. He detests philosophers.

"Speaking of philosophers," says he darkly, "your friend, Voltaire, has been airing some of his views."

"My friend?"

"Didn't he dedicate *Tancred* to you?"

"In the same way that he managed to obtain a

ON THE KING'S COUCH

place as gentleman-in-waiting to you. He is as much my friend, Sire, as he is your servant. But as a matter of fact, Monsieur de Voltaire is a very fine writer; I recognize his talent."

"Sire," says Choiseul, "like the Marquise, I am of the opinion that Voltaire will bring great honor to your reign."

"Oh, well," says the King, "if you are all going to side against me—nevertheless, your friend, Voltaire—your friend, Marquise; your friend, Duc—has just published a dreadful book, I am told. Religion and all venerable things are torn to shreds. The clergy are very discontented. The Archbishop of Paris came to tell me about it."

"And what is this book, Sire?"

"I think it is called *L'Ingenu*. Have you read it?"

"Certainly, Sire. It is very amusing. And I can assure you that his raillery is not dangerous."

The King mechanically twists his rosary in his fingers.

"Do not be too sure of that, Marquise. All those people you call philosophers are overturning the old established order with their mockery. They have undermined all feeling of respect. And without respect, what on earth would become of the monarchy?"

"Who knows, Sire?" says the Prime Minister. "The wheel is turning. The philosophers are on top to-day, to-morrow they will be dragged through the mire. This is the most changeable of nations, except

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON

in its fidelity to the august family of the Bourbons—and that is unalterable.”

“You are trying to reassure me, Duc. It is quite useless. I know certain facts.”

“Sire,” says the favorite, “don’t let yourself be annoyed by a few pages of satire that a great thinker has let fall from his pen. What does it amount to after all? Ask Monsieur Quesnay; you call him your ‘Thinker.’ He says that all those tricks of the pen are of no more account than a game of battledore and shuttlecock.”

The King turns towards the old man.

“Is that true, Thinker?”

He shrugs his huge shoulders.

“Really, Sire, I do not think that this literature is very important. I have not always held this opinion. Once upon a time I even wrote an article for the *Encyclopedie* on ‘Clarity,’ and I was much given to the study of metaphysics; but now I laugh more heartily at my own effusions than any one else.”

“Our friend the doctor is too modest,” says Madame de Pompadour. “Sire, I must lend you his new book on government. It makes one long to rule in order to apply his ideas to agriculture and commerce.”

“Long to rule!” says the King, with a yawn. “Good Lord, that is a wish no king would express.”

After a short silence he continues:

“But the Marquise is right, Monsieur Quesnay, you are a great and learned man, and since I am

ON THE KING'S COUCH

very fond of you, I would like to give you a patent of nobility."

"Thank you very much, Sire," says the economist hastily, "but I have no children, no family. What would I do with a diploma like that? Every one would make game of me."

"It is my wish, you will have a coat of arms; it will speak for itself: the philosopher's stone on a field of pure gold. I will arrange it with d'Hozier."

And as the doctor maintains his sullen reserve, he adds sadly:

"Submit to your own formula, Quesnay: *Laissez faire, laissez passer*. It will be a great satisfaction for me. And kings have so few."

Then the conversation turns into other channels. Louis is teasing Madame d'Amblimont and Madame d'Esparbes. It is getting quite late. The Marquise signals to them to withdraw. Then she goes towards the King.

"Sire," says she with an almost imperceptible courtesy, "I had thought that perhaps Your Majesty would enjoy supping at Bellevue. I have ordered a very tempting supper. If the King will consent we will be shepherds and shepherdesses. There will be costumes for every one when we arrive. We will be entirely by ourselves, with no one even to serve us. I shall myself have the honor of serving my master. And I can promise him a surprise."

The idea pleases Louis. He adores masquerades. The Marquise, who is an expert actress, often arranges festivals in order to revive his waning interest. Some-

times she is a dairy maid, a nun, a nymph, or a *houri*.

"How delightful, my dear," he says graciously. "I will go wherever you go. You always have the most ingenious ideas. It will be a welcome rest from the State dinners."

He calls Gontaut:

"May I ask you to summon my horses, my dear Duke? In the meantime, we will take a little walk in the garden. After this terrible heat, we will, I hope, have a cool evening. Come, Marquise."

He offers her his hand. They go out on to the terrace through one of the French windows. Their chosen companions follow.

It is still light. The sun has slipped down behind the woods which surround the park, but a soft after-glow suffuses the sky and the clouds twine in and out like billowing draperies. The gardens are empty. The water in the marble basins between the parterres ornamented with palms and shells, whose silhouette is broken now and then by tall clipped yews, are little islands of light. The great Tapis Vert, with its fringe of statues, and the Grand Canal make a triumphal avenue for the setting sun. The gleaming white palace on its high terrace is the enchanted bower of Circe. A few scattered silver peals ring from the chapel bell. The air is sweet.

The coaches are lined up before the north façade. Madame de Pompadour has anticipated her Lord's wishes. Gontaut had found it quite unnecessary to send to the stables.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"You think of everything, Marquise."

"A great king must not be forced to wait."

"You are adorable."

"I adore you, Sire. That is the way to put it."

She eyes the King caressingly and presses his hand softly.

They walk towards the carriages. A footman, in Oriental robes and a headdress of white plumes, holds a huge gilded parasol over their heads.

The King stops for a moment to look about him. Monsieur de Sartine leaves the rest of the suite and steps forward to take leave.

"You are not coming with us, Sartine?"

"I must ask Your Majesty to excuse me. I must return to Paris. I have work which will take almost all night."

"Pray go then. Come to my levée and tell me the news."

The King's indolent eyes light up for a moment. Sartine's news is invariably composed of gallant adventures; the latest escapades of the courtiers and the upper clergy, the encounters of the bourgeoisie in the brothels: at Madame Gourdan's, at Porcheron's, at Ramponneau's house—

The King's great scarlet and black coach is waiting. Immobile postilions check eight white horses which paw the ground nervously. Behind, is the Marquise's green and gold carriage, with six dun horses decked with beribboned head bands. Then Choiseul's coach. A young negro in a yellow turban taller than he,

JEANNE-ANTOINETTE POISSON

brings Madame de Pompadour a silk mantle. Standing about the King, the ladies and courtesans in their wide panniers are like colored bells. The gorgeous evening is a glory all around them.

V

A SOCIAL CALL

"JUST put your hand here, Maréchale," said the Marquise. "Feel how fast my heart is beating. It is costing me very dear to take this step."

"You are certainly not obliged to do it, my darling, and I have done all I could to dissuade you."

"I know it. But I cannot remain in this depressing state of uncertainty. I must know where I stand."

The two women were traveling down the coast of Picardy in a very plain coach without a crest. Their interest in their enterprise was heartfelt and they discussed it freely. In spite of her sharp voice and her peculiar appearance, Madame de Pompadour preferred the lively little Maréchale to all her other friends. She could freely pour out her heart to her. Madame de Mirepoix was too ugly not to be fairly virtuous; her one small fault was avarice. Through the Marquise's influence she had obtained a large pension, an estate, and agreeable positions for the members of her family. Not that she was not sincerely devoted to her. In spite of the fact that she was a Duchesse, a Maréchale, a former ambassadress and a descendant of the oldest blood of France, she willingly acted as tire woman and housekeeper to the daughter of Poisson the bankrupt.

A SOCIAL CALL

"I would certainly have preferred to have her come to see me," continued Madame de Pompadour. "I asked the Duchesse de Lauraguais, who often goes to Passy, to ask her two weeks ago, but she has never come."

"That is perfectly natural. Our fine lady wants to be importuned now that we have sought her out. You will give her a very high opinion of herself by doing this."

"It makes no difference. This interview is absolutely necessary. It may bring about great results. One does not consider one's pride when happiness and life are at stake. And my very life and happiness are at stake. Listen, my dear: I haven't told you this before, but before determining upon a distinctly formal visit, I had already made an attempt in secret. You will not approve, I am afraid; but never mind, I want you to know everything. I wanted to see Mademoiselle de Romans, without witnesses, without pretensions. I did see her."

"Where?" asked the dumbfounded Maréchale.

"Yesterday, in the Bois de Boulogne."

"How imprudent! Did she recognize you?"

"Apparently not. I had been informed that she took her child out every morning for a walk in a certain part of the Bois. When I left the factory at Sèvres with Madame du Hausset—I had gone to buy some cups to give to the King—I passed by there. I stopped my coach, and went on foot towards the place which had been pointed out to me. As we drew near I took du Hausset's arm and hid my

ON THE KING'S COUCH

face, putting my handkerchief to my mouth as though I had a toothache. I walked up and down for a few minutes that way. I could see Mademoiselle from the path, seated on the grass next to her son. She really was a picture; and I am a connoisseur of beauty. I went up to her. She looked at us. I nudged du Hausset, and she accosted her and said:

"That is a very beautiful child, Madame!"

"Yes"; she answered with a smile, 'I agree with you, although I am his mother!'

"I would have liked to tell her who I was, and have a talk with her, but I was afraid of being interrupted. She and du Hausset merely exchanged a few polite phrases, and we took leave and went back to the carriage."

"If any one from the Court had appeared, you would have been in a very awkward situation. You would surely have been recognized. What a scrape."

"I don't doubt it. It was very embarrassing, especially as several passers-by were staring at us. But it really is asking too much to expect me to invariably follow the dictates of reason. I gave in to a whim. And, taking it all in all, I am very glad I did. Now, at least, I have my mind made up. The Romans woman is too beautiful; her son is too exquisite. If I do not act, and act quickly, I am vanquished before a blow is struck. Faced with the problem of choosing between us, the King would choose her. I am going to arrange things so that he will not have to choose."

She sank back into the cushions murmuring:

A SOCIAL CALL

"You have no idea how much the child looks like the King. It would be fatal if he were to become interested in that baby, or even fond of him."

"Don't make things seem worse than they are, my darling. Just between ourselves, the King is completely egotistical, and is not concerned with any one but himself."

"That may be. But as men grow older, they find more and more amusement in children. I have been told that he pets and caresses this little one a great deal. I wish you could see him, but I do not think that the young lady would care to bring him to see us. It would be rather lacking in taste."

"You can expect almost anything from that type of woman."

"Yes," said the Marquise and went on with her story:

"When I got back to the château, my mind was made up. I didn't want to find myself going over the whole problem again, so I burned my bridges behind me. I wrote to Mademoiselle de Romans."

"You wrote to her?"

"Yes. Here is a rough draft of my note."

She read:

"Madame—Everything that I have heard about you has tended to make me more and more anxious to make your acquaintance. As I am driving to Auteuil to-morrow afternoon, I shall take the liberty of stopping for a few moments at your home. I hope that we shall be able to have a very pleasant little

ON THE KING'S COUCH

interview. In the meantime, Madame, may I assure you of the cordial good wishes of

THE MARQUISE DE POMPADOUR.

Versailles, June twenty-sixth, 1763."

The Maréchale thought for a moment.

"You should never have written it," she said.

"Supposing she were to show the letter to the King."

"You must take me for a fool. Naturally that occurred to me, and I weighed every word in that note. What harm is there in my wanting to make friends with some one who has been singled out by my master? This would not be the first time that happened. Were the King ever to find out about my visit, I would tell him that I went in order to make certain that Mademoiselle de Romans was worthy of his attentions. But he will never know. Unless I am very much mistaken, our proud beauty will fall into my trap this evening. After that, she will be unable to take a step in any other direction but the one of my choosing."

"Don't be too sanguine; you are so impetuous."

"Do you really think so?" asked the Marquise with a dry laugh. "Here we are at Passy. It really is a charming village."

The coach drew up in a rectangular court, shut off from the street by a trellised grill. It was hemmed in on either side by stables and servants' quarters. At the farther end, facing the gate, stood the house; a large, gray, two-storied building, with a simple triangular pediment, and a high mansard roof. The

A SOCIAL CALL

entrance was at the head of a flight of shallow steps, surrounded by laurels and orange trees planted in blue tubs which bore witness to the fact that they had come from the royal greenhouses.

The two women were received by a liveried manservant and conducted through a bare antechamber with checker-board tiled floor into the salon. The Marquise walked in. She still had the lilting carriage of a bacchante, as supple as in the days when she was Madame d'Etioles, that patient huntress who pursued the King through the forest of Sénart and gladdened his eye with her sylvan grace. The Maréchale followed after, a lumbering barge in the wake of an elegant brig.

The salon was empty. It was a large room with light paneling and simple, almost rustic, furniture that breathed a sturdy bourgeois taste. The curtains were flowered *toile de Jouy*. There was no carpet. Only one bit of decoration: facing the mantel, in lonely majesty, was a full length portrait of the King. That Prince, who much preferred more intimate surroundings, loathed this stately effigy, but Anne had bought it herself and she clung to it as though it were a trophy. The royal presence in mantle and cuirasse soothed her; it was at once the glorious excuse for her sin, and a present promise of future grandeur.

"Not a very pretentious establishment," said the Marquise. "Our Master has not been rashly extravagant. You see, Maréchale, there is nothing like seeing for one's self. But the garden is very fine."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

Before the two tall windows stretched a park with parterres, mazes and arbors, studded with little fountains. There was a charming marble basin of water, and the near-by foliage of the Bois de Boulogne seemed to extend the lovely garden to an infinite distance.

"That portrait is simply ridiculous," whispered Madame de Mirepoix. "Does she think this is the throne room?"

"Patience, my dear," answered the Marquise ironically. "We will educate her tastes."

A firm, almost virile step rang on the sonorous tiles. Anne appeared in the doorway. The visitors arose.

"Bonjour, Madame," said the Marquise with amiable dignity. She walked over to Anne, and after a perfectly timed courtesy, she held out her hand. "Madame la Maréchale de Mirepoix has been so good as to accompany me. She is fully acquainted with everything that concerns me, and shares my sincere interest in you."

Anne greeted the Marquise not ungracefully and led the two women back to their chairs.

As soon as she received the favorite's message, realizing its implications, she had forwarded it to Casanova by Lucas, her trusted messenger. By a rare good fortune, the Chevalier was at home in his agreeable little house, having just returned from one of his mysterious trips which he never took the trouble to explain. As a matter of fact, the goal of

his travels, which were supposedly devoted to diplomatic affairs, was often a pair of pretty arms. The King's business seemed to take him quite frequently to various charming little villas in Paris or the neighboring suburbs. Before receiving Lucas, the Venetian had hidden Mademoiselle Fanchon, his seamstress, behind the curtains of his bed. He had just elevated her to the rank of womanhood in a moment of ennui.

He was half dressed; a little weary, but mentally alert. He read Pompadour's note, thought it over, scratched a few words on a piece of paper, sealed it, gave it to the valet, and hastily went back to bed.

Do not come to any agreement, my darling, until you have spoken to me. You must be on the watch for traps, especially from a certain person. You take the least risk by refusing all advances. I will see you to-morrow. I haven't a moment to-day, and besides, it would be very bad policy.

Casanova's note was far from being a disappointment to Anne; it dispelled all her hesitancy. His advice was well suited to her frank outspoken nature. She felt strong enough to face the Marquise who had obviously come to reconnoiter in the enemy's territory, and probably to open hostilities. She was armed with her pride, her love for her son, and her deep confidence in the King's sensual dependence on her. And so her greeting was quite fearless, and her naturally serious voice betrayed no emotion.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"It is an unexpected honor," she said smilingly, "for me to receive two of the most distinguished ladies of the Court in my home."

"You may rest assured that our call is due only to our interest in you," said the Marquise, who was taking an inventory of her rival without seeming even to glance at her. "It is no fault of mine that I am only now meeting the object of His Majesty's solicitude. I am passionately interested in anything that concerns the King; his amusement, his happiness, and his glory are the only objects of my ambition. If you are of the same mind—and I am inclined to believe you are—we should soon be fast friends. I must admit that I was attracted towards you the minute I saw you."

The Maréchale, planted in her armchair, contemplated the scene with sullen detachment. Anne bowed as Madame de Pompadour finished her speech.

"I can promise my deep respect, Madame," she said in a reserved voice, "and my complete obedience."

"Obedience is too strong a word, Baroness; your good will is all I ask."

"In what way, Madame, can I prove to you my good will?"

The Marquise could not help admiring the sharpness of this reply. The beautiful Mademoiselle de Romans was not as simple as her descriptions would have it. She was right, too. Why not play the cards face up, without wasting any more time?

"Good Lord, we both realize our respective posi-

A SOCIAL CALL

tions. Let us be frank. That is the best way. I came, Baroness, to propose to you that we come to some agreement that will insure the peace and contentment of the King to whom we are both so fondly attached."

"The King's peace and contentment?"

"Yes, certainly. It depends entirely on our mutual good will. But, if I may go so far without wounding your dignity, the—relation which I would suggest would bring about a very appreciable change in your position."

"I do not understand you very well, Madame."

"You will soon understand. The King, as every one knows, takes a great deal of pleasure in your company. Notwithstanding, you have not, up to date, been placed in a position by His Majesty that would worthily insure your son's future."

Anne saw her adversary's maneuver behind the carefully chosen words. She drew back prudently.

"The King has fulfilled every one of my wishes. He has given me this house which is all I could want. As to anything that might touch upon the child; he has recognized his son."

"Recognized him? Oh, no. Not altogether. The parish register does not contain the King's names and titles, but only the name Louis de Bourbon. There is a distinction there which cannot escape you."

"You are very well informed, Madame."

"I know how to obtain information. I must repeat that my devotion to His Majesty makes me ex-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

tremely anxious to be friendly with you. Whether I can prove it to you depends entirely on you. As I was saying, your son has no real ranking—”

“The King, Madame, has promised him a rank commensurate with his birth.”

“If no one interferes to remind the King of his promise at a propitious moment, he is quite likely to forget. Your son is not his only natural child. He has ten or fifteen, and does not bother with any of them.”

“Take the child he had by Madame de Vintimille,” said the Maréchale in a casual tone, “the little Count de Lude, a charming child, and the image of the King. He doesn’t pay the least attention to him. Fortunately the mother’s family was rich and provided for him.”

“You must excuse me, Madame, I know nothing about Court affairs.”

“I realize that, my dear,” said the Marquise bluntly, “and that is why I am warning you. If you will take my advice, there will be new developments which will be entirely to your advantage.”

“May I ask what they will be, Madame?”

“Very well, I will be frank,” said the Marquise, with a sudden gesture, and a change of manner that might easily have passed for spontaneous. “Your son will be legitimate. You will receive a brilliant title and an open position at the castle, in the service of the Queen or Mesdames.”

And so the proud Marquise was fallen as low as

A SOCIAL CALL

this. Anne's heart swelled with pride. Casanova had been clairvoyant when he had told her, two weeks before, not to succumb to the invitation transmitted by the Duchesse de Lauraguais. Now anxiety had driven Madame de Pompadour to the point of bribing her young rival. How shaky she must have felt her position to be.

But almost instantly, Anne's mounting exultation was supplanted by distrust. She collected her faculties and answered quite coldly:

"What makes you think, Madame, that I have anything like that in mind?"

"Believe me, Baroness, this is not the time for dissimulation. You are ambitious; of that I am certain. It is quite natural for a woman with your beauty, and as I now perceive, with your character. There will be no obstacles to your ambition on one condition—"

"Well?"

"That you will be fair and open with me. I will help you as far as it lies in my power to do so. And my power is not to be sneered at. You, on the other hand, must be a faithful and trustworthy ally."

"In what possible way could an alliance with me be of any use to Madame la Marquise de Pompadour?"

"My dear, it is no secret that the King and I have been no more than friends for a good many years. Our excellent sovereign, whose temperament has never cooled, has found distractions elsewhere, and I have never objected. But I have kept my place

ON THE KING'S COUCH

in his affections, and that is the dearest thing in life to me. He consults me about everything and I give my opinion on every subject that arises. To put it clearly, I take part in the government, and I can truthfully say that I have often rescued the King and his ministers from very pressing situations. I hope to play this rôle for a long time. You are not at all fitted for the part. It requires a preparation, a craftiness, an understanding that you could not possibly have and that have taken me years to acquire. Never make the mistake of aspiring to this position. I have decided on another for you. It will be devoid of worries and crises. You will never find yourself the butt of jealous and acrimonious attacks. You will be our Master's chief joy and recreation, while I will remain his sole adviser. If we could come to such an agreement, it would put an end to all attempts to find favor with the King. It would mean the happiness of the King and of France."

Anne was silent. The Marquise was certain that she was fascinated and acquiescent. She went on.

"I think that my word is enough, I do not doubt yours. After I am gone, for you are young and my health is tottering, you will rule alone."

"Madame," said Anne, "I admit that your proposition dazzles me. I was not at all prepared for it. I am extremely grateful to you, but you must excuse me if I say that I cannot possibly give you my answer immediately."

A SOCIAL CALL

Madame de Pompadour was infuriated. Her eyes gleamed dangerously. This little upstart was expected to break out into protestations of joy and gratitude. And she was very far from swooning with ecstasy. She would have to be persuaded.

"You wish to think it over," she said sourly, "to speak to your friends—to Monsieur de Casanova, perhaps. That is not the best policy, Baroness. You would do well to make your own decisions."

Anne felt the thrust.

"I do not know, Madame, why the name of Monsieur le Chevalier de Seingalt should occur to you, although he is one of my acquaintances. It seems to me that this is a matter that requires a certain amount of reflection."

"No," said the favorite haughtily, "you should be able to give an immediate answer to my proposal. Accept or refuse; you have no other choice. I came hoping to arouse your sympathetic understanding. If I waited until to-morrow for your answer, the element of spontaneity and good feeling would be totally lacking."

There was a weighty silence. Finally Anne said:

"Forgive me, Madame, if I ask one question. What if, in spite of an urgent desire to please you, I could not enter entirely into your views?"

"You would hesitate, Madame?" asked the Maréchale.

"I did not say that I was hesitating, Madame."

The favorite shrugged her shoulders.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Good Lord, Baroness, you are quite free; you know that. If you ally yourself with me, you will be protected and provided for. If this does not fit in with your plans, I shall be forced to conclude that those plans extend farther than I had imagined. In that case, you would have to continue on your way alone. You would run certain risks; I think that is clear."

"And what would those risks be, Madame?"

"I am not prepared to say. The King is very vacillating in his tastes."

"You mean to say that he could be influenced against me?"

"It is quite true that His Majesty's attention is easily distracted," said the Maréchale meaningly. "Madame la Marquise de Pompadour has made you such a generous offer that your hesitation seems rather extravagant."

"I must repeat, Madame, that I am not hesitating."

The lovely Mademoiselle de Romans stretched out her hand. Madame de Pompadour and Madame de Mirepoix watched in blank amazement while she rang a bell.

"Bring Monseigneur," said Anne quietly.

"Monseigneur?" exclaimed the Marquise and the Maréchale.

"Isn't that the proper title for the King's son?"

Her tone was such that the Marquise was floored.

"You are anticipating, Madame," said the Maréchale. "Considering that His Majesty has been very

secretive about this up to date, do you think that these pretensions will be very pleasing to him?"

"That is a matter for the King to decide, Madame."

The nurse, a well-dressed peasant girl, brought in the child. The baby himself was covered with the most rare and exquisite lace.

"Give him to me, nurse. I wish to show Louis-Aimé to these ladies. I will ring when I want you."

Anne took her son in her arms and held him up in the light.

He was large and strong for an eighteen-months-old child. His head was covered with thick dark curls. He bore a singular resemblance to the King. There was the same pale skin, the black, almost immobile eyes, the mouth like a cherry, even the mark on the chin. As Anne had remarked, the aquiline nose already bore proof of his Bourbon blood.

Anne kissed his plump cheeks. The child waved his hands and smiled at his mother.

"He seems in excellent health," said the Marquise coldly.

"His parentage is molded on his face," said the Maréchale.

Madame de Pompadour glanced at her scornfully.

"It is quite fitting," she said, "that this baby be present at our interview as it is his future which is at stake."

She was silent. A moment, perhaps, elapsed. Anne bounced her son on her knee and seemed to have forgotten her visitors. Finally the Marquise was forced to speak.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Well, Madame, we must go, or we will keep His Majesty waiting. What is your answer?"

Anne's smile showed her exquisite teeth.

"My answer? Here it is, Madame."

She pointed to the Royal child, fresh and beaming; magnificent, joyful and gracious.

Madame de Pompadour arose.

"I understand you, Madame," said she in a voice that was raucous with irritation, "you do not feel that you will need me in order to provide for that child's future. I sincerely hope that you are right."

"Perhaps you are wrong," said the Maréchale.

"The King loves his child, Madame. I must be patient and depend on his promises being fulfilled. Nonetheless, I thank you for your proffered assistance."

"I am sorry that you will not accept it. But at least, Madame, I have had the pleasure of assuring myself that you are not altogether a myth. Adieu, Madame."

She passed slowly before Anne, who had placed her son on the couch beneath the King's portrait in order to conduct her callers to the door. Madame de Pompadour swept the picture and the child with one glance. It was startling. She bit her lips furiously.

"There is one thing that you have forgotten," she said, pointing to the portrait. "You should have planted the white oriflamme and the fleur de lys of the Bourbons over your house. That would be the ideal way to call every one's attention to the King's

A SOCIAL CALL

caprice. I am sure that he would be delighted.—Are you coming, Maréchale?”

Anne clenched her fists. She had the strength to remain silent.

“Escort Mesdames to their coach,” said Mademoiselle de Romans to her lackey.

VI

CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR

STANDING in the sunny garden, Madeleine Varnier gave Casanova her hand as any courteous friend would do. As soon as they crossed the threshold of the little pavilion, she offered her lips to him. They were seated on a couch that might have had great possibilities. Notwithstanding, the Venetian did not consider the moment suitable for rendering more formal homage to his companion. He had spent a very tender evening with one of his most delightful conquests, Manon Baletti, the dancer. His projects for the day required that he mete out his strength sparingly. He had included Madame Varnier in his roster of mistresses partly through policy, partly through curiosity, partly because she was Anne's sister. In spite of his pleadings, after all these months, he had been unable to win the beautiful Mademoiselle de Romans. He wanted her more than ever, more than on that troubled evening when she had almost been his, when by a miracle he had mastered himself. He had never given up. He had tried persuasion and guile; he had always been met with obstinate resistance, with tears and anger. Yet he did not doubt that Anne had a weakness for him.

"How charming you are in that dress," he said

CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR

carelessly. "It is most becoming. I am delighted to find you here. I had hardly expected to."

He said these words, moved by his innate desire to be seductive. As a matter of fact, Madeleine's presence was decidedly irksome. He had counted on seeing Anne alone. When he saw Madame Varnier, he had been forced to control a gesture of impatience. She had come between them too often. He was quite content that Madeleine, a woman with a good head on her shoulders and a sound knowledge of practical matters, should keep house and keep the accounts, as Anne was quite incompetent and would have let every one fleece her unmercifully. But it would have made things much more pleasant if she had relaxed from her duties once in a while, thought Casanova. He had come to the point of wondering if Madeleine was not acting out of a distrust for him. He had thought that she would be blind to the actions of one who was her lover. She had seen through his move, her assiduousness had not diminished. Should he openly dismiss her? At first he had considered this. But he knew that it was impossible. Anne was fond of her sister in spite of her weaknesses; she considered that she owed a great deal to her: she would never have sacrificed her. He must live on good terms with this Argus; their interests were bound up together. Later on, when Anne had an established position, Casanova could more easily buy her absence by gifts and favors.

In the meantime, he dealt with her adroitly. But in his disappointment at finding her once more under-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

foot, he could not resist saying, half seriously, half in jest:

"Do leave me with Anne, won't you? I must talk business with her."

"Is my presence distasteful?" asked Madame Varnier, piqued.

"Who knows?" said the Chevalier lightly. "We might be constrained by your presence."

This jest put Madeleine on the wrong scent. She continued in the same vein:

"No infidelities, I trust?"

"You wouldn't be jealous of your sister? That is not being done."

"I am afraid that any one who is jealous of you has a good many difficult moments."

Casanova answered her with a mocking glance, and taking a pinch of snuff from his gold and enameled snuff box, inhaled it voluptuously.

Anne had been at Versailles all morning. They were waiting for her in a pretty little rustic summer house, at the end of the garden, beside the little pond. A few steps led up to a square room illuminated by four windows with tiny leaded panes which opened on the garden on all sides. It was late July and there was an abundance of flowers. A great Turkish divan, heaped with cushions, ran the length of the wall. There was a table in the center. A feast could be spread in this bower, or a concert assembled. Anne often went there during the hot months. It seemed infinitely far away from Paris. There was no sound but the homely sounds of Passy;

CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR

the crowing of a cock, the hammering of the blacksmith. And the lines of trees, stretching out indefinitely—

Casanova flicked his jabot of Malines lace; a few grains of tobacco had spilled upon it.

"My dear Madeleine," he observed importantly. "You see before you one who is practically an ambassador. I had an interview this morning with Monsieur de Choiseul and he has entrusted me with a mission. I am leaving for England to-morrow."

"What are you going to do there?"

"Do you think that a diplomat may be questioned on his secret business? Never fear, I will tell you. I am going to London to play off the Marquis de Guerchy against the Chevalier d'Eon."

"D'Eon, the creature who may be either a man or a woman?"

"Exactly. I am quite interested in meeting him. As to his sex, I will woo him tenderly and let you know the results. But that is not all—I must plumb the real intentions of the English Prime Minister. Choiseul is so worried about the rumors of extensive armament that he foresees another war."

Casanova's air of importance impressed Madame Varnier.

"Will you be gone for long?" she asked.

"A few months, perhaps. Perhaps less."

She sighed.

"That is a long time. How lonely Anne and I will be without you."

"It can't be helped. I can't refuse. It is the first

ON THE KING'S COUCH

upward step. The Prime Minister made it quite clear: he said that it was an introduction to greater things. I hope I can measure up to them."

"And in the meantime, Anne will be here with no one to advise, and it is a very critical moment."

"You will take my place."

"The Marquise must be furious that Anne spurned her offers. Perhaps she might have done better to accept them."

"No, no," said the Chevalier vehemently. "A sincere agreement is impossible with that woman. She is the most perfidious of creatures. I am convinced that Anne was right in remaining deaf to Pompadour's propositions. She holds all the trumps. In this game, any one who weakens or loses heart is sure to be vanquished."

"Do you think so? That does not alter the fact that this odious creature is going to plan intrigues to turn the King against Anne."

"The King is in love with her, my dear. Don't forget that."

"He has been in love with a good many others who have not lasted."

"Anne has been in favor for three years. That is no longer a passing whim."

Madeleine Varnier did not seem convinced.

"I wonder if Choiseul, who obeys the Marquise unquestioningly, did not give you this mission in order to get you away from here?"

"Nonsense. They were considering sending me to London long before Madame de Pompadour came to

CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR

Passy. This is the third time that I have seen him on this matter."

"Chevalier, Chevalier, you should not go away."

"Bah!" said the Venetian. "You are imagining things. We are sailing before the wind and we have almost reached port. The King can not get along without Anne. Just see how he detains her. She should have arrived here long ago. Besides, even if you are right, even if they do want to get rid of me, it would be my cue to appear to fall in with their plans. Our enemy thinks that I am working for her downfall. My departure will lull her fears. She will be less worried about Anne, and Anne will be more at liberty to deal with the King. For she must act promptly. She must stop relying on vague promises breathed into a pillow. The King probably puts them out of his mind at the same time as he puts on his vest. I count on you to egg her on, you know how much she needs encouragement. She is perfectly adorable, but she has no gift for intrigue. If we were not here to spur her on, her anxieties would be completely set at naught, by the, to my mind, rather insufficient charms of her little toy king."

"But you are leaving."

"You are staying, and you have enough influence with her. Besides, I am planning to return very soon, in secret. At the least sign of disturbance, let me know. With good horses and favorable tides London is only two days from Paris."

Madame Varnier remained lost in meditation.

"My dear," she finally murmured, "I fear treach-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

ery from Pompadour. That woman terrifies me. Sometimes I am sure that we will never succeed in driving her out. You are a sorcerer of sorts. Couldn't you manage to make her disappear by a charm?"

Casanova laughed.

"No, unfortunately. My magic is not up to that feat. I had considered seducing her. But she has not that temperament. She is as cold as marble. And then she detests me. She told my friend Richelieu so. She considers me a mere adventurer."

"It is true," he added, "that I have had some adventures."

Anne stood framed in the doorway, gilded by the sunshine. Her sister and the Chevalier were so absorbed in their own thoughts that they did not hear her enter. They arose in some embarrassment.

"What were you two doing?" she asked. "I am sure that a conspiracy is on foot."

She took off her light cape and her hood trimmed with wide ruching and tossed them on the sofa. Casanova kissed her hands.

"It is true, dearest Anne, that we were conspiring while we waited for you; conspiring for your success, for the defeat of the Other Woman. Your sister was proposing that we whisk her away by magic."

"That should not baffle a magician like you. Couldn't you transport her to the Indies on a flying carpet, the way it was done in Monsieur Galland's story of the Thousand and One Nights?"

CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR

Madeleine Varnier closed her lips in a hard line. A resolute pucker appeared between her eyes.

"After all," she said. "Why not try to weaken her with powders and potions? Exhaust her, confine her to her chaise longue. Then the King, who is not fond of sick people, will refuse to see her and she will be forced to resign herself and leave court."

"Poison her?" said Anne. "No, no, no. I will never consent to that."

"Who said anything about poisoning?" asked Madame Varnier hastily, but with a glance at Casanova. "There would be no idea of killing her, only of rendering her harmless for the time being."

"I had considered that," observed the Venetian almost inaudibly.

"Nothing is easier," continued Madeleine. "I know the Marquise's second man in waiting—and very well, too. He is a wretch named Jeanraud, and my husband once saved him from the galleys. He had stolen some trifle. I rescued him from the most abject poverty, and Lebel, on my recommendation, gave him a position in the private apartments of the palace. He was later transferred into the service of Pompadour. He owes his position to me, and he hasn't forgotten it. I think that for a good round sum of money he would consent to empty the contents of a phial into his mistress's food."

"I refuse to allow such a thing," said Anne in a commanding tone. "I would go myself and warn the Marquise. I forbid you both to think of these

ON THE KING'S COUCH

horrible methods of overcoming her. We will find some other way."

She was so dazzling, so beautiful, that Casanova felt himself on the verge of agreeing with her.

"It is risky," said Madame Varnier. "Pompadour reads the King like a book. She is continually on the look-out for new sensations and pleasures for him. The genius she has for amusing people counts for a great deal with a monarch who has been bored all his life. It is uncertain whether affection, granted that he is capable of feeling it, would overbalance this factor."

"Let us drop this subject," said Anne, cutting her off sharply. "You make me both sad and angry. And I was so happy when I left the château."

"How was the King?" asked Casanova.

"Charming, as always. I was very warm, and with his own hands he offered me a drink from a chiseled silver-gilt goblet which had belonged to the late Duchesse of Châteauroux. And he ordered me to keep it."

"But what about some money? Did he give you any? I urged you to bring up the subject of finances."

"Money! it is easy to see that Madeleine is not very well acquainted with His Majesty. It is no sinecure to make him loosen the purse strings."

"But the Marquise swims in money," said Madame Varnier sternly.

"She has the Prime Minister and the Comptroller-General at her feet. She gets all the credit she wants

CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR

through them, whereas I depend entirely on the King's private income. And Louis sighs mournfully every time he drags out a bag of pistoles. Can you believe it, my dear Chevalier, but I did not have enough money to pay the expenses when Louis-Aimé was born. I was forced to borrow a small sum from Paris de Montmartel. I gave him my note, and I shall repay him later on."

"You amaze me," said Casanova. "How can the greatest King in Christendom be so niggardly with some one he loves?"

He arose, and turning his pockets inside out emptied their contents on the table: louis, florins, doubloons, about six thousand livres in all.

"There, my darling. I had good luck at the gaming tables yesterday. All this is for you."

"You are foolish, Chevalier," said Anne. "Take back your money. It is of no use to me. You know my sister well enough to know that she is always complaining of poverty."

"You cannot deny," said Madame Varnier, "that you are living on credit and that at this very moment you are short of funds."

"My dear girl," he said, "allow me this privilege. I insist. Am I not your friend? Permit Jacques Casanova, knight of varying hazards and companion of the order of luck, to supplement the generosity of the King of France."

Anne was embarrassed, but she was afraid that another refusal would wound the Chevalier, so she em-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

braced him gratefully and made no more objections. Casanova swelled with pride.

"Did the King speak to you about me?" he asked.

"No, never again. He must know through Sartine's reports that we see each other now and then, but it does not worry him." Then not knowing how truly she spoke: "So as to allay his fears, I told him that you were Madeleine's lover."

Madeleine laughed mirthlessly.

"Many thanks for guarding my reputation so jealously."

But the Chevalier looked at her meaningly and she broke off. Soon after she said she must leave. Anne and Casanova escorted her to the house, along the geometric paths bordered with roses, and hedges cut in shapes of birds and triangles.

"Do not stand where you can be seen through the gate," said Anne to the Chevalier. "I am always afraid that some one of the police may be prowling about. Go back to the summer house. I will join you as soon as I have seen my sister to her carriage."

Casanova slowly retraced his steps along the flowered walks. He stopped for a moment beside a little pool. There was not a ripple on the waters, and in the center was a tiny triton blowing a conch shell. Thoughtfully, he walked all around the stone margin of the pool.

He was very well pleased with life. Manon Baletti was a constant source of pleasure; Madame d'Urfé was a constant source of income; and he was on the threshold of the political career he had always

CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR

ardently desired. All his wishes had been satisfied, one after another. Only Anne—

He saw her at the end of the walk. He went to meet her, and together they melted into the cool shadows of the little summer house. Her huge rose-colored taffeta skirt made a soft silken noise as she sank down on the couch. Casanova took off his sword so that he could sit next to her.

He told her about his trip. Anne had expected something of the sort, for he had described to her the conversations with Choiseul which had led up to it. Nevertheless, her gayety was somewhat diminished. She was silent as the Chevalier confided his plans to her.

"A Mission from the Ministry is quite important," said he. "It will earn me a substantial reward, a decoration, a fairly certain position, perhaps even a title. But even that is not enough. What I would like to do, Anne, is to work not for Choiseul, but for the King. To be in his secret service like the Broglies, to represent his personal opinions to the other monarchs, that would be the right way for me to gain advancement. When you are the recognized favorite, we will bring the matter up, and we will be able to bring it about without any difficulty. For the time being, I am obedient and I go. When I come back, I will command obedience from others."

His prominent eyes gleamed. His ingenious mind harbored the ambitions of a Mazarin. Anne watched him with mingled fear and admiration. How handsome he was; how strong! If his luck held, he had

ON THE KING'S COUCH

the ability to carve out a great name for himself.

"Will you write to me?" she asked.

"Of course I will write to you. Not directly, though. I will find some means. But do be careful about my letters. Either destroy them or hide them well. By the way, what have you done with my other letters?"

"They are in a locked casket. No one can get at them."

"Burn them. There is nothing like burning them."

"Perhaps I will burn some of them, but there are others that I must keep. They will be a consolation in the absence of my dear Chevalier."

It seemed to Casanova that her voice had trembled a little.

"And those important letters from the King, the ones in which he recognizes your son, what have you done with those?"

"I always keep them on my person."

"You ought to entrust them to me. I would put them in a safe place. Supposing you were to lose them, or some one should steal them. The Marquise must be aware of their existence. It must have occurred to her to obtain possession of them. She is not the kind to hesitate at anything."

"What could any one do with those two letters?" she asked. She smiled. "No one but the King would ever have an opportunity of stealing them. And it would never occur to him."

"You might faint."

CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR

"I never did such a thing in my life. I am not a frail woman, Chevalier."

"No," said Casanova. "It is quite true that you are like an amazon. Madame d'Urfé, who is very fond of you, claims that you are the reincarnation of the divine Antiope, the beloved of Theseus, who bore him Hippolytus. You can readily see the allegory. The good woman likes to use symbols in her conversation."

Anne's face had clouded at the mention of Madame d'Urfé.

"Oh, that old lady. Do you still see her?"

"I run into her now and then," said the Venetian, and there was an enigmatic smile on his lips.

Anne sat with her chin propped on her two hands, looking at Casanova. It was a pose very characteristic of her.

"What do you and Madame d'Urfé do all the time? Do you make love to her?"

"That respectable old lady? Have you ever seen her?"

"Yes, I know her quite well. She came to see me once with Madame de Lauraguais. I am convinced that she is mad. She said all sorts of foolish things to me."

"She is a little queer, it is quite true. But she is an excellent woman and very much interested in magic. We are doing some work in astrology together, and as she has a magnificent laboratory it is quite possible that with her help I may some day make some extraordinary discoveries."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

Anne was not by nature curious but she said:

"When you come back from London may I witness one of your experiments?"

"My dear, you must not dream of such a thing. Our experiments endanger the life and soul of the participators. Only the initiate may be present. No one else could escape the consequences."

"Sometimes you frighten me dreadfully."

She sighed deeply. Casanova was caressing her hand.

"Where are you going after you leave here?" she asked.

"I am supposed to sup with the Maréchal de Richelieu."

"Will you sacrifice the Maréchal's supper to me?" she asked softly. "Stay with me this evening. You are leaving so soon—"

"Of course I will, darling Anne. Your graciousness is charming. But when will you be as gracious as I would like you to be? How divinely happy I should be if only you would consent to love me a little."

His arms slipped around her and his hands crept over her.

She freed herself, but without any resentment.

"Be good, my dear," she said. "You know I am very fond of you."

"A sisterly affection! Very cold and slight in comparison with the kind of affection I demand. I am like a man dying of thirst, and you tantalize me, but you never satisfy me."

CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR

"I leave that to others—"

"It can not be helped," he murmured, "but it is entirely your fault. You have only to say the word, to find me eternally constant and faithful."

"I have been told that you lead a very dissipated life, that you have three or four mistresses, not to speak of Mademoiselle Manon the dancer. They say that she came to Paris to join you and that you are her protector."

"How exaggerated such rumors always are! Manon is like my daughter. Yes, that's it, like my daughter, or a niece; a charming niece—"

He was laughing. She laughed, too, but without much sincerity.

"How can I help it, my dear? All my life, I have been the victim of my senses. But I would soon give up these chance pleasures, were I able to touch the heart of the one woman that I have ever really adored."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Why, why do you repel me? I can make you happier than your old sultan ever could. I can match every one of his experiences with one of my own—and more. I am young. And I can say with Virgil, my darling: 'I am not so deformed; it would be possible to love me.' Anne, Anne, will that moment never come?"

"Chevalier," she said trembling, "I loved you from the moment I saw you. If it had been possible, I would have given in to your pleading long ago. But I have told you why I cannot; it is on account of

ON THE KING'S COUCH

my son. I am certain that if I am faithful to the King, Louis-Aimé's future will be all that I could desire. My enemies would never prevail against me. I see that you are laughing at my superstitions."

"What foolish ideas. The King does not worry about your conduct nearly as much as you think. He did not concern himself about the Marquise's affairs with Soubise, with Bernis, with Choiseul? And the King himself, do you think he is faithful to you, my dearest?"

She hesitated a little before answering.

"Yes, I think so. At least he tells me so."

"What a farce! Is it possible that you do not know that there are always at least two amiable young persons in his house in the Parc-aux-Cerfs, and that he visits them quite frequently, disguised as a Polish nobleman? And you must have heard that Pompadour arranged an affair between him and the little Tiercelin girl. It would be foolish of you to be too scrupulous, my darling; the King is not very cavalier with you."

"It wounds me to hear you say these things," she whispered. "My position is very difficult as it is. You take away all my courage when you talk about the King's—peccadilloes."

"But they are mere bagatelles. The King does not love you any the less because he seizes these fugitive chances for enjoyment. I would quite approve, if only you did not consider yourself bound to him by a solemn oath. What a peculiar idea of love you have, my poor child."

CASANOVA THE CONQUEROR

"Isn't love above all a surrender of the heart? But the customs of this country do not agree with me," she said bitterly.

"My dearest, do not lay so much stress on the heart in this matter, and consider your desires a little more. By heaven, they deserve some consideration. To love is to find gratification and pleasure. And secrecy adds greatly to its enjoyment. To others we will seem friends; for ourselves we will be lovers. Who would know? We will share the greatest and most tender of secrets."

"My sister would soon guess."

"Why? Anyhow, she loves you, she has your best interests at heart. And then I am leaving."

Anne strove vainly to force back her tears, but they stole from beneath her eyelids.

"You are weeping, my darling. Let me kiss away those charming tears that prove that you are not adamant to my unhappiness."

He crushed her in his arms and covered her face with stormy kisses. Anne was dead weight in his embrace; she no longer struggled. Casanova was muttering disjointed words, ecstatic, really almost out of his senses. Her eyes closed. Suddenly she shuddered and clasped her arms about him.

PART THREE

I

A KING'S WORD OF HONOR

LOUIS took from his pocket the little gold and enamel lorgnette which he always carried. His eyesight was poor. Drawing back a few paces, he scrutinized the portrait of his lady love.

Hubert Drouais stood at a respectful distance, holding his palette. According to the prevalent mode, and in keeping with his own tastes, he had painted *Mademoiselle de Romans* looking more like a goddess than a mortal woman. The background is a soft gray-blue, and Anne is wearing a fur wrap over a gorgeous blue velvet gown, embroidered in gold. Her breast and arms are bare. With one hand she is holding a sulky little cupid, while with the other she is clipping his wings. The King himself suggested this allegory to the artist. As her cruel scissors finish their work of forcing the little god to remain at her side, she smiles. It is an elusive smile, quite unlike her own; it is the celebrated "smile of Drouais," provocative, malicious, and haughty. But the lovely oval of her face, her great, wide, amorous eyes, the amber beauty of her skin, all are faithfully reproduced.

"I am very well satisfied, Monsieur Drouais; you

ON THE KING'S COUCH

have surpassed yourself. I like this portrait even better than Madame Victoire's, and the other is excellent."

"Your Majesty is most indulgent. With a model like Madame la Baronne, even a mediocre painter would feel himself inspired by a stroke of genius."

"You are a flatterer, Monsieur," said Anne. "But I am grateful to you for making me so beautiful. And since the King is pleased, I must redouble my thanks."

"It is finished, isn't it?" asked Louis XV.

"I must ask Madame to give me one more sitting, Sire. If Your Majesty is willing, I will return the day after to-morrow to add a few finishing touches to the cloak and the background."

"Don't, for heaven's sake, spoil it. And when you are through, have it sent to Lebel."

Drouais bowed. Being a Court painter, and Boucher's rival, he was well dressed and had very elegant manners. He was a handsome man, and still quite young. A good many of the great ladies who sat for him were far from unkind to him.

After putting away his palette and his brushes, he came to bid good-by to the King. Louis indolently held out his hand for him to kiss. Drouais bowed deeply to Mademoiselle de Romans and disappeared.

Anne was astonished at the order to send the portrait to Lebel.

"Sire, what are you going to do with the picture?"

"Can't you guess, my sweet? I am going to have it

A KING'S WORD OF HONOR

hung in my study in my own private apartments. I want it where I can always see it."

Anne was unable to hide a blush.

"You do me great honor, Sire, but—"

She stopped in embarrassment.

"But what, my dearest girl?"

"What will the Queen say if she sees it?"

"The Queen won't see it. You forget that she never comes to my wing. Fortunately! What a saint my wife is. Just now I am very much worried about her health."

He spoke of Marie Leczinska with a sincere respect. She is undoubtedly the only woman he held in very high esteem. He saw her only on state occasions, and he never neglected to shower her with attentions. As a rule, the Queen lived modestly in her own apartments, away from the noise and intrigues, surrounded by a select group, composed of President Hénault, a few bigoted old women, and some aged priests.

Leaning on Anne's shoulder, Louis goes slowly over to the huge winged armchair near the fireplace. It is his favorite chair, and large enough so that he can take Anne on his knee. But to-day they are very well behaved. Anne sits on a cushion at his feet.

He seems more in love with her than ever. That very day he had brought her a box of dominoes upon which he had traced all sorts of tender sentiments: *My heart belongs to its tender tyrant—I am unhappy when I am away from my shepherdess*—and similar inanities. Although he reads a great deal, Louis

ON THE KING'S COUCH

writes abominably. In order to execute his masterpiece of calligraphy, the King had spent more than one morning locked up in his study with vials of different colored inks at his elbow. In the meantime, ministers and ambassadors vainly waited for audiences. He had gone even farther in his affection for Anne. He had been lucky in a grain speculation, for he is far from disdainful of such plebeian practices, and had made a sacrifice of his natural avarice by giving his mistress a beautiful string of pearls to replace the modest black velvet ribbon which Anne had always worn around her neck. This munificent gift had made a great stir in court. Madame de Pompadour had appeared much disturbed. As for Anne, she is of course very much pleased, but far from being in ecstasies. Jewels are not what she wants from the King.

While he plays idly with his mistress's hair, Louis chats casually about this and that. He loves this easy conversation, but only his most intimate friends ever hear him speak in lighter vein. In public, his unconquerable timidity usually makes him seem distant and glacial. With a privileged few, he strips his princely manner, even then falling back on his royal dignity at the slightest breach of manners.

With Anne, he is at ease and prone to be confidential, for she is neither inquisitive nor a gossip. He never brings up the question of politics. The discussions he has with the Marquise and his ministers are sufficient. But he slyly describes all the little occurrences at Court, and the spicy tales that Richelieu

A KING'S WORD OF HONOR

and de Souvré have told him. Sometimes he relates the current obscenities of Paris. Louis's knowledge of his capital is limited mostly to nocturnal scenes; balls, houses of ill fame, street brawls and all the favorite material of the scandalmongers. Not that he feels the need for a justification of his own sins; he considers himself above the moral code of the herd. But there is a sense of complicity and an atmosphere of morbid amusement that he would not have willingly parted with.

Anne looks off into space, and fails to hear the absorbing details of the recent pranks of Monsieur de Lauzun, or the surprises which are the lot of Monsieur de Jarente, the decidedly unregenerate bishop of Orleans, in his relations with Mademoiselle Guimard. The King is so interested in his anecdotes that he fails to notice her distraction.

She is disturbed and worried. Vague fears torment her. She has not seen Casanova since that fatal moment which she still regrets. It is not her respect for the King, but an ineradicable superstition that causes her to wish that she had never yielded to the Chevalier's advances. She is certain that her infidelity will set the wheel of fortune spinning against her. Casanova is still lingering in England. She cannot imagine why, as his mission was over long ago. In his letters he claims to be busy doing countless important things. He must be detained in London by a woman, probably. Sometimes Anne is aroused from the emotional apathy that has become habitual to her since her lover left, by a sharp stab of jealousy.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

She feels that she will never have the slightest hold over the man who dominates her; she will always be his when the whim seizes him, then he will leave her and not return until the mood is on again. She will be his docile little toy. But he fascinates her. In spite of her mental reproaches, he need only appear in person and she will open her arms to him.

He writes to her almost every week through the good offices of a little seamstress that he once befriended. Anne tells her sister about the letters but does not show them to her. Madame Varnier receives letters herself, but she does not even mention them. He gives Anne advice; foresees every situation; tells her whether to act or to speak, to be sad or laugh, to be frank or to dissimulate. His letters are manuals of instructions in love, full of knowing stratagems that will overcome the King's last hesitations and elevate her to the rank of acknowledged mistress. Then it was but a question of time before she would be Queen, and her son a prince of the blood: there would be only the detail of the bar sinister.

She habitually follows his advice, for he is almost imperious at times. But she is often disgusted with their cynicism and brutality. What can the Chevalier think of her? His experience must have been entirely limited to prostitutes. In her moments of despair, she retreats into herself and regrets Grenoble, the calm simple life there, and her youthful dreams. Then she joins her child in his little games, absorbs herself in him, and tries to forget. Does forget.

A KING'S WORD OF HONOR

Suddenly, something that the King says, coinciding with her thoughts, recalls her to actuality. She raises her head.

"I haven't seen Louis-Aimé to-day," he says. "Have him brought here."

He likes to see him run about, gambol and shout. He is a big plump-cheeked boy, over two years old. He is very lively, very gay; brimming over with health and beauty. He swings by the King's lapels, explores his pockets, which always contain candy, plays with his watch and snuff box, and calls him Papa-King. Louis treats him with an indulgence he has never shown to any one else. Although he has grown to love his daughters dearly, he was not attracted to them as children. His vanity is tickled by the beauty of this autumn child and his resemblance to a more youthful Louis. It might even be that a deeper feeling is aroused.

"He went out with his nurse," says Anne. She has foreseen this request and prepared her attack accordingly.

The King frowns in vexation.

"Why didn't you wait until I had seen him? You know that he amuses me. I wish to see him every time I come here. I love that child."

"Let us hope that that is true, Sire," says Anne coldly.

Her tone of voice does not escape the King. But he makes no reply. He senses the approach of one of those scenes that he dislikes so thoroughly. Acting upon Casanova's advice, Anne has recently been less

ON THE KING'S COUCH

tactful. She has waged open war on the Marquise. Twice victory had been in her grasp and she had thought that her rival would be dismissed. But the King had taken refuge in subterfuge. He had squirmed out of a difficult situation on a pretext. At another time, Anne displeased Louis and barely escaped disgrace herself. For a whole week the King neither came to Passy nor sent for her to come to the palace. Finally he gave in, unable to do without her. She humbled her pride and was most gracious. And Louis who has suffered greatly at the thought of losing her, begins to feel that he will have to make a different and final arrangement for her future, and cede the position of acknowledged mistress to the woman who rules his senses if not his heart—that locked and egoistic heart.

The silence is stifling. He decides to break it.

"What is the matter, my sweet? You seem worried."

"There is nothing the matter, Sire."

He takes her hands in his. They are cold. He warms them in his own. Then, pulling her towards him, he kisses her milk-white graceful neck and lovely breast. She does not resist, but she is as passive as Galatea before Pygmalion's caresses had wakened her to life.

The King is hurt by her silence and indifference.

"Come, come, my dear," he says, "why are you so ill humored? You would not by any chance sulk with me?"

"No, Sire, I could not possibly be sulky. But I

A KING'S WORD OF HONOR

cannot help thinking things over. As Your Majesty says: I have many worries."

"Worries? Money?" asks the King hesitantly.

"No, indeed. I have all that I need. Your Majesty has provided for all my wants."

"Then what worries can you possibly have?"

She does not answer. The King gets up and takes a few turns about, with his eyes fixed on the floor.

He knows perfectly well what Anne is driving at. He would give a good deal to avoid this discussion. She turns her head away and he looks at her. She is very beautiful—

He takes a deep breath. He is overcome by that bent head and that air of grief. He would be more able to resist words than silence. He knows that he will give in.

For the King is motivated in his growing acquiescence by one factor that the beautiful *Made-moiselle de Romans* does not suspect.

The day before he had been decidedly irritated by *Madame de Pompadour*. He has not paid her a visit all day and is still resentful. The *Maréchal de Richelieu* was the author of this misunderstanding. The *Marquise* had refused all winter to consider his son, the Duke of Agenois, for an important position that he felt he should have. Accordingly, he carries on a bitter intrigue against her, without openly exposing his feelings, and opposes her at every opportunity with an expert malignity.

The *Maréchal* had regaled the King with a certain sally of Frederick the Great's. Frederick was dis-

satisfied with Madame de Pompadour and Choiseul's Austrian diplomacy. "Is the King of France blind?" he said. "Cotillon II thinks she is regent, by heaven. She gives personal instructions to ambassadors and writes them private letters. The cabinet at Versailles seems to be under the direction of a strumpet. I feel sorry for France." Louis hates Frederick II. He not only beat the court generals, Soubise, Contades and d'Estrées, in the long war which had just come to a close, he not only annexed India and made a great power of Prussia in the peace treaty. The coroneted philosopher of Sans Souci makes cruel sport of Louis XV: laughs at his fastidiousness, his indolence, and his love affairs. The Marquise had furnished Frederick with a new pretext for a jest, so Louis is embittered. The favorite takes advantage of his kindness, she forces her views on the ministers, and peoples their offices with her creatures. It is the standing joke of Europe. It cannot go on.

It occurs to Louis that he is under the necessity of sacrificing Madame de Pompadour to Mademoiselle de Romans, and he can face the problem with very few regrets.

"Well, my sweet, I can see quite clearly that this situation cannot last much longer. You deserve more than I have done for you up to date. At last, I am going to satisfy your demands. Tell me what you wish, and I will try to arrange things accordingly."

Anne is overwhelmed with joy. She is gaining her long desired goal, the goal she sometimes despairs of ever reaching, with almost no struggle.

With success at hand, she is uncertain for a moment, drained of strength and will. But she quickly recovers herself, and perching herself on the King's knee, embraces him tenderly, with all the joy in her heart.

"My dear lord, you would make me the happiest of women, the most grateful of mothers, if you would recognize my son, Louis-Aimé."

"Well—well! I will send the necessary documents to Parliament. He is already registered as a Bourbon in the baptismal act, isn't he? I will legitimize him, and give him the title of Count of Blois."

"Sire, will I be permitted to keep him with me, and bring him up?"

"Certainly, my sweet. How could I have the heart to separate you?"

"Ah, my dear lord, how good you are to me," says Anne nestling her head on his shoulder.

"And what do you want for yourself?" says the King. Now that the die is cast, he is quite carried away by his mistress's enthusiasm. "You see, my dear child, I have thought it over very carefully; I can be happy only with you. The Marquise is agreeable, but she is becoming old and ugly, she is so often sick. And then her ambition is so wearing. I need your youth and vigor, your light-heartedness and beauty. You are very beautiful, my sweet. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. And I have seen a great many. I have given my word and I am resolved. You will be presented at Court. You will have your suite in the château; near mine, in

the North Wing. We will find you a position—yes, an important position. Lady-in-waiting, perhaps, with the title of Duchesse. There are extinct titles which can be revived. It just occurs to me; there is Gisors. How would you like to be Duchesse of Gisors?"

"Sire, anything you decide will be wonderful, as long as I can stay near Your Majesty."

"That is just why you are going to come to Versailles. We will spend the nights together. I will be in your apartment more than in my own."

"I will be so happy. I will devote my life to thanking you and pleasing you. But, Sire—"

"What, my sweet?"

"The Marquise. What will you do with her?" she asks in a low voice.

"Ah, the Marquise," he says, his face darkening, "the Marquise. There is the rub."

He strokes his chin thoughtfully.

He has been so weak as far as the haughty favorite is concerned and for so many years. He was unable to refuse to humiliate his only son, the Dauphin; he forced her on the queen, in spite of that lady's natural repugnance; her caprices have broken generals, magistrates and ministers: Maurepas, d'Argenson, Machault, Belle-Isle, the Bishop of Soissons. He is so weak when he is faced with the charm of her presence, her look, her delightful little ways, her fascinating voice.

But he is far away from her at this moment. He feels strong, he is the master once more, the despot before whom twenty million men bow their heads.

If Anne understood him, she would seize this unique moment and ask the King to send a letter, direct from Passy, ordering the Marquise to exile on one of her estates, and forbidding her to try to see him. He would willingly consent, only too delighted to avoid the reproaches, tears, and supplications which are so irksome to his pleasure-loving soul. But Anne is too simple, too loyal, too unaccustomed to the intrigues at Court. She does not realize that she should obtain the immediate fulfillment of her royal lover's promise. She does not know that it is a light fragile thing, and exposed to dangerous influences.

"The Marquise?" says Louis. "Bah! I will exile her to the Provinces."

"My dear lord," says Anne, whom a complete victory has made overgenerous, "I think that that would be sending her too far away. Madame de Pompadour has been attached to Your Majesty for a long time. She does not deserve such harsh treatment. It would be enough if she were sent to live in her lovely palace in Paris with a large pension to console her for her lost position."

"So be it," says the King, greatly relieved now that his decision is made. "I will make all the necessary preparations for this change. But, my darling Duchess, I must ask you to keep all this an absolute secret. Say nothing to any one—not even to your sister. If my plans were to be discovered before the right moment, I would be put in a very embarrassing position. But you have my royal word of honor. A

month from now, you will be established at Versailles and my Parliament will receive letters legitimizing Louis-Aimé. Kiss me again— You have my word.”

An hour later he leaves Anne and returns to Versailles in the plain gray carriage with only one lackey which awaits him in the court. As soon as the sound of the horses' hoofs has died away, Anne rushes several times around the room, nearly crazy with joy. She feels a need of moving about, speaking, letting herself go. She is beside herself.

“I did it by myself, all by myself. How surprised the Chevalier will be! He *must* come back now. How I would love to see him!”

She runs over to a little cabinet near her bed, touches a spring and opens a secret compartment. She takes out a letter, Casanova's last letter. She throws herself into the King's armchair, and rereads passages which she already knows by heart. She skips the advice, the exhortations which are now useless, and comes to these lines:

“I see you in all my dreams, darling. The memory of your beauty, the apparent beauty which the whole world knows, and the secret loveliness which I am privileged to know, never leaves me. I am constantly longing to see you. Why did I ever go away from you? I must have been out of my senses. A fig for politics, business, money, glory even. All I want is you. If only our happiness could begin again to-morrow! Unlike your old Sultan, I would need no

A KING'S WORD OF HONOR

potions and pills to prove my love for you. I kiss your eyes, the sweetest in the world, your warm lips, all your beautiful body—"

Anne reads no more. Her cheeks are flaming.

"The crazy boy. But if he were telling the truth; if he really loved me! With my son a prince, and my lover back, I would be so happy I could not bear it."

She kisses the letter passionately, and puts it back in its place.

"My dear Chevalier," she murmurs. "This time you will be happy."

II

THE LETTERS

WHEN Madame Varnier's valet had closed the door of the salon, Casanova kissed both sisters warmly. Then he said:

"What is the matter, and why are you so excited?"

He looked from one to the other and smiled, perfectly calm and collected. They seemed in consternation and remained silent. He sat down next to Anne. Madeleine stood facing them, leaning on the mantelpiece.

"Chevalier," said Anne, "we were forced to ask you to come back immediately. We were so helpless without you. Our plans are in great danger; my letters have been stolen."

"What letters?" demanded Casanova, who was no longer smiling.

"The ones Anne had kept. The ones you told her to burn."

"My letters. *Per Bacco!* This is very serious. And what about the King's letters, recognizing the child?"

"They couldn't find them. I always have them with me."

"I would rather have had them taken. The King would have learned nothing from them."

THE LETTERS

"Do you think that any one would show them to the King?"

"*Parbleu!* did you doubt it for one moment?"

Madame Varnier shrugged her shoulders and looked at her sister impatiently.

"Good Lord, good Lord," murmured Anne.

She had expected furious reproaches. Nevertheless, although Casanova knew very well that all his plans were about to be annihilated on account of her carelessness, he did not show any anger. He was a man who lived for the present, and thought only about the immediate future. A mistake had been made. But it was irrevocable. What was the use of recriminations? The only thing to do was to ward off the consequences.

"Don't tremble that way, my own," he said. "Let us try to reason this out calmly, and look at our position clearly. There are a great many things that you must tell me. The note which your sister sent to me in London begging me to return at once and not to come to your house was not at all enlightening."

"That was altogether necessary," said Madeleine bitterly. "Too many letters had already been written, and they were much too explicit. It was no time to incur any more risks. You must have understood my note, since you are here."

"Of course, of course. But now give me the details of the theft; it is rather important. When did you notice that the papers were gone?"

Anne seemed to relax under the spell of his magnetic eyes.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"A week from to-morrow. I had just returned from Versailles where I had spent the night, something that I don't usually do. I went over to the little table where I kept the letters, to put away my pearls. I had the key myself. It fitted in a peculiar way. The lock seemed out of order. Finally I succeeded in opening it. My casket had disappeared. I called my waiting women, my lackeys, even the gardener. I told them that some one had stolen my jewels. Madeleine, who came in at that moment, questioned them, too. You know how she can manage servants. She couldn't get anything out of them. They knew nothing; they had seen nothing, and had heard no suspicious noises."

"I am certain," said Madeleine Varnier, "that they were telling the truth. It was the thieves' policy to avoid trusting any one unnecessarily. They took advantage of Anne's absence, and entered her room by night, coming in through the garden. Some one picked the lock of the little service door. I found marks of a tool; mere traces, to be sure, but they showed that the intruders were experienced hands. Nothing had been taken, so they were not professional burglars. The silverware was untouched. It immediately occurred to me that they might be minions of Sartine."

"It is quite evident," said Casanova. "Your reasoning powers are marvelous, my dear. Sartine obeys the Marquise implicitly. She felt her position was becoming more and more insecure, and decided to

risk everything on this robbery. Now she has us in her power."

Anne rose; she was very pale; and said with ill-concealed anger: "What an idiot I am! I have ruined my son's life. The only excuse for my conduct was my hope for his advancement; and now that hope is shattered. My instincts did not deceive me. Had I been faithful to the King, I would have nothing to fear."

"Had you been faithful to the King," Madame Varnier said severely, "we would not have the problem of those letters."

Anne did not shed a tear but she twisted her hands in a paroxysm of regret and anxiety. Casanova chewed his lip. He went over to Anne and pushed her gently into a chair.

"It is not hopeless yet, my darling," he said. "We have not lost everything yet."

"But if those letters are in Pompadour's hands—"

"Of course they are. We can only wait and see if she plans to make use of them immediately or if she is keeping them to use in case we attack her. Apparently she has done nothing with them up to date. Have you seen the King since the robbery?"

"Yes, twice; both times at Passy."

"Was his attitude towards you unchanged?"

"It seemed to be, but he is so secretive—but I am almost certain that he knows nothing. He was most attentive and played with Louis-Aimé."

"I hope you said nothing to him. You didn't make allusions and try to pierce his reserve?"

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"No, I had thought of doing that—and then I didn't dare."

"It would have been the greatest folly. You were quite right to wait. But did he speak about the Marquise again?"

"He said something about her, and just as usual, he seemed cold and indifferent towards her."

"Until we have definite proof to the contrary, let's go on the supposition that the King is ignorant of this affair—and I personally am quite sure that he is—but that will not help us to anticipate the movements of Pompadour and Choiseul. I am certain that they are both involved. If the Marquise were exiled, the Prime Minister would lose his position."

"What shall we do?" said Anne.

Casanova paced up and down, pondering. The eyes of the two women followed him.

"We must choose between two courses of action," he said in a low voice. "In the first place, Anne could let the Marquise know that she has decided to accept her proposition, that is, to remain the King's mistress, but without any attempts to meddle in politics. If Madame de Pompadour consents, it would at least be a respite for us, if not a final arrangement."

"Any sort of respite might save the whole situation," said Madame Varnier, and her face lighted up.

"How humiliating," said Anne.

"—or else," continued the Chevalier, "we must openly defy her. We could strike out instead of temporizing; we could attempt to overwhelm our adversary before she has time to take action. Anne

THE LETTERS

insists that the King carry out his promise immediately. She demands the disgrace of the Marquise and of Choiseul as well. It is indispensable, now that things have come to a head, to ruin them both at one blow. Two orders signed by the King are all that is necessary. Even if she should send him the stolen love letters, we could weather the storm. You, Anne, could insist that the letters are forgeries."

"That would never be feasible," said Madame Varnier. "One or two of them might be forgeries, but not ten or twelve. You write too many letters, Chevalier."

"I am not so sure. In diplomatic circles false documents come in large bundles. In any case, if we present such a defense, the King, in his infatuation for you, might close his eyes to Pompadour's claim. They say that he is easily influenced. He would probably need very little persuasion. As far as I know, he has never been accused of jealousy."

"But, Chevalier, he has already spoken to me about you. I told you at the time that he was quite angry."

"Come, come, he is not an Oriental despot. I have heard that all he asked of M. de Brige, his groom, was to let him know if he ever shared in the Marquise's favors. He will sulk for a while, but if Anne knows how to deal with him, he will soon forget it."

"That is a dangerous plan," said Madame Varnier. "Any amount of luck is necessary in order to have it succeed."

"Haven't we had a good deal of luck already? Doesn't Anne's advancement verge on the mirac-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

ulous? Don't forget that she was born under a lucky star."

Casanova realized that he was forcing Anne to take action and he wanted to encourage her in every possible way. A certain blind confidence was necessary. He knew from his own experience that without this confidence any perilous enterprise was doomed to failure.

But Anne shook her head. "Perhaps I was born under a lucky star, but now it is different."

Casanova wheeled on his high red heels and laughed heartily.

"I prefer the other method," continued Madame Varnier. "At least it gives us more time. She will not have to stake everything on one throw of the dice."

"And you, my darling, what do you think?"

"I don't know, I really don't know. I would find it very painful to ask Madame de Pompadour for her protection after having refused to consider her advancement."

"And then, who knows," said the Chevalier, "whether she would consent. She made her proposal when she had no defense against you, but now her position is considerably strengthened. I don't believe she would do it. Pompadour is not the woman to show any consideration to some one who is threatening her. It would be better to face her than to rely on her discretion. Anyhow," he went on, for the two sisters remained silent, "the Marquise is thoroughly detested. We will not lack influence. She

THE LETTERS

has still managed to remain on good terms with Richelieu because he presented her to the King when she was still Madame d'Etioles, and because he has the King's confidence. He is completely opposed to Pompadour and would help us. He has already offered me his services."

"He wrote you?"

"No, I saw him."

"When was that?"

"Just before I came here. When I arrived from London. I found a note asking me to stop by at his palace. I went immediately, before coming here."

Anne seemed hurt. How could Casanova have hesitated to fly to her assistance when she was in such terrible danger? How could he have first gone to make advances to Richelieu? The Chevalier guessed what was going on in her mind.

"You can well understand, my darling," he said, "how valuable the advice of such a clever man would be to us."

"What did he tell you?"

"He said in so many words that it might very well be that some intrigue was on foot against Made-moiselle de Romans. He did not seem to know the details, but the Marquise was certainly making plans. He told me to beware of her and said that if he received the slightest piece of information, he would let me know. Just as I was about to leave, he stopped me and said that if I ever found I was unable to leave France, I should come to him. He would always have a passport at my disposal and a bag of pistoles. He

ON THE KING'S COUCH

told me that I had amused him a great deal and that I had succeeded in enraging the Marquise to such an extent that it was worth his while to help me. Then I left him and here I am."

"It's a warning," said Anne. "Coming from the Maréchal it means a great deal; he is so well informed about all the Court intrigues. Didn't his advice mask a suggestion of flight for you, Chevalier? You should follow his suggestion, my dear, and leave; at least for the time being."

"Abandon you," said Casanova hotly, "when your career is in such a critical state? You know me better than that."

She found his words very comforting. The Chevalier might be irresponsible and immoral, but he did not turn his back to danger. She turned towards him and the anxiety had almost left her eyes, but Madame Varnier still glowered and retained her hostile attitude. She could never forgive the Venetian for having put her sister in this position. Above all, she resented the fact that he had become her lover. Anne had confessed it all to her in the excitement over the theft of the letters. She had been incensed. Her scorn for their mismanagement of the whole intrigue was mingled with her feminine jealousy. She had never revealed to Anne that she had been the first of the two sisters to be Casanova's mistress. She had been afraid that Anne's tempestuous nature would drive her to all kinds of excesses. Things had come to such a frightful pass that dissensions would have been fatal.

THE LETTERS

"Take heart, my dear," said the Chevalier. "We still have a chance of winning if we maneuver successfully. When are you going to see the King again, Anne?"

"He is coming to Passy to-morrow."

"Very well. You wrote me that he had solemnly promised that he would make a public announcement of the legitimatization of his son and your introduction at Court."

"He gave me his royal word of honor that it would all take place within a month."

"And when will the month be up?"

"In four or five days."

"Then it is only necessary that he keep his word. Remind him to-morrow. The day after there is a great banquet at Versailles. The King usually announces the privileges he has accorded at these banquets. You must demand, Anne—you must demand, do you understand—that on Thursday he declare you Duchesse and lady-in-waiting at the palace. Pompadour and her friends will be thunderstruck. Perhaps in their surprise and fright they will not dare to make use of the letters. They will fear the vengeance of Anne de Romans, the most influential person at court. After all, even if the King sees the letters you will be near him, and you will be able to deaden the blow. Make love to him; burst into tears; feign indignation; insist that the letters are patent forgeries. It is your best defense, whatever you may think of it. By the time he has verified the handwriting and instituted an inquiry, his anger will have subsided. I

ON THE KING'S COUCH

will warn Richelieu, who will back you with all his power. If Choiseul falls from grace, he will succeed to the ministry."

He became animated, reassuring them both by his vitality, his inventiveness, his cynical and unyielding assurance. At heart he was delighted with this battle of wits. How he would have loved to play a prominent part in this drama!

"Everything depends on you," he concluded, "on your nerve and insistence. Now that we have made our plans, the worst is over. If I were in your place, my love, I would be certain of success."

"I am much less certain than you," said Anne. As soon as she thought about this grueling struggle with Louis, the spell of Casanova's words was broken and she felt her alarm growing. "You don't know the King. He is the soul of irresolution. He hates to be hurried. He may perfectly well refuse. What will I do then?"

"Then, my child, you will play doubles or quits. You will threaten to retire to Grenoble with your son if he refuses to give you complete satisfaction. You can dissipate his hesitation by a show of firmness. In order to keep you, he will give in."

Just then some one knocked softly on the door.

"Come in," said Madame Varnier. Casanova, with an air of complete indifference, stood before the mirror, arranging his wig. Anne took up *Le Mercure*, which lay on the table. A valet came in.

"Madame la Baronne," he said, speaking to his mistress, "Monsieur Lebel sends a message that Madame

THE LETTERS

need not expect a visit from the King to-morrow."

Anne turned pale, but her voice lost none of its poise. "His Majesty did not say when he would come?"

"No, Madame. That was the whole message. I felt that I ought to come and tell Madame la Baronne immediately."

"You were quite right, Lucas. You may return home. Tell them not to prepare supper. I will stay here this evening. How is Monseigneur?"

"Monseigneur is in excellent spirits," said the valet, "and has not asked after Madame."

"Thank you, and now you may go."

The valet left. They looked at each other. All three had one thought.

"The Marquise has struck," said Casanova. "Instead of waiting for the King to come to us, you must go to Versailles to-morrow."

"Suppose he should refuse to see me?"

"Then we will have to decide what we are going to do. I shall remain here. But above all, do not write to him. Arrive unexpectedly. Pompadour has surely taken measures to prevent any letter from you reaching the King. Janelle, who distributes the mail, is devoted to her."

Madame Varnier was greatly agitated, but Anne—now that she was faced with a real danger—quickly regained her natural calm. The Chevalier congratulated her.

"It is absolutely necessary," she said bravely. "If I consulted my own preferences, I would give up the

ON THE KING'S COUCH

struggle. We would leave together immediately. It would not matter to me where we went. All I ask is your affection. Some humble refuge in the Provinces, even in a foreign country. But Louis-Aimé's future depends on me," she said tenderly.

"Our vengeance also depends on you," said Casanova, clenching his fist. "Pompadour has acted infamously. My one desire is to crush her."

Madeleine Varnier had been sitting in a corner with her head in her hands. She seemed lost in her thoughts. But suddenly she stood up, and looking fixedly at Casanova, said in a solemn voice, "I can assure you that if she ever forces Anne to give up the King, the Marquise will not live to enjoy his favor."

Casanova seemed not to hear her reply. With his hands thrust in the pockets of his vest, he was whistling a mazurka by Collé that was very fashionable at the time.

III

AT BELLEVUE

THE curtain had just fallen on the last act of *Le Devin du Village*. The little Chinese stage had been recently redecorated by the Marquise's order. Madame de Pompadour herself had played the rôle of Colin. She had danced gracefully and sung with great artistry. But towards the end, she had seemed exhausted, and after it was over, she fainted in Gontaut's arms in the wings. The audience comprised hardly forty people. Only the greatest personages of France had received the signal favor of being invited. Grouped around the King, they listened to Rousseau's ariettas which were accompanied only by hautboys and flutes. No one had applauded, as etiquette required that the King give the example. But even when the actors returned to the stage to bow to him, he did not clap. He was seated in the center of the room in a large gilded armchair, and wore a coat of crimson cut velvet with white satin breeches. He sat motionless, with his cane between his knees; his look was freezing, his eyes were impenetrable, his sensual mouth was slightly ajar. The Maréchal de Richelieu, who sat on his right, modeled his countenance after his master's. His aging, dissipated face bore an expression of disdainful

ON THE KING'S COUCH

seriousness which frightened Madame de Pompadour more than the King's attitude.

As soon as she reached her dressing-room, she took off her costume as quickly as her fatigue would permit. Before appearing before Louis XV in her court dress, she had a brief interview with Choiseul.

"Send Sartine here," she said. "He was in the auditorium. Tell him to come immediately with all his papers. You saw the King's face. He said exactly three words to me. Choiseul, I have a feeling that I have lost."

She raised her deep intelligent eyes towards the Duke, her accomplice and lover. They were her only remaining vestige of beauty.

Her face would have been livid without the paint which covered it. Two bitter lines dragged down her mouth. Her graceful figure owed its lines entirely to artifice. She was sick, and only her miraculous will power kept her on her feet. She coughed continually. Her soft voice had become almost harsh. From time to time, she had sudden attacks when she thought her heart must surely burst. The fever never left her. She employed all sorts of drugs to combat it, and tried all sorts of cure-alls, in spite of the repeated warnings of Quesnay. He ordered her to rest, but his words were in vain. How could she rest and relax during this dreadful crisis?

"Put on a little more rouge, Marquise," said Choiseul gently, struck by her spectral look. "You seem tired this evening. I will go and find Sartine myself. You are quite right; the King is about to

make some calamitous announcement. He said something to me this morning which has not left my mind since. I was talking about the dispatches to Spain. I said that you would doubtless agree with me that the family pact ought to be extended to all the reigning Bourbons. He asked me if I had shown the dispatches to you. I said that I had not because I felt that he ought to see them first. He told me not to tell you about them, and when I protested he said: 'Do as I order. I have plans of my own.'

"I have never heard him speak so curtly, or look so stony. I cannot imagine what he is considering, but we had better act quickly or it will be too late."

"Go ahead, dear Choiseul," said Madame de Pompadour, pressing his hand. "And be quick. A minute lost may be fatal."

He disappeared. She straightened up and tried to smile and went slowly to find the King.

The first gentleman-in-waiting, in accordance with etiquette, had just asked Louis which of the courtiers were invited to supper. When the officer held out the list to him, Louis, who usually wrote down the names of the elect with his own hand, almost succumbed to habit. But he recovered himself and shoved away the list.

"No one," he said.

"What, Sire," said Madame de Pompadour, "Your Majesty is not going to do me the honor of supping with me? I had ordered a very tempting repast."

"No. I am afraid I would not enjoy it this evening."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Your Majesty is not ill, is he?" she asked with an air of alarm.

"No. But I am bored."

One by one, the "No's" fell from his lips. The Marquise sank in a courtesy deep as though she were bowing at the altar. The King had turned his back before she arose.

The Commandeur de Souvré was standing near him. He was a very frank man who spoke the bitter truth, even to his master. His fidelity excused this fault.

"Well, Commandeur," said the King with a yawn, "you are not enjoying yourself very much either, I imagine."

"Sire, I am surfeited with concerts, operas, and ballets, and I don't like music."

"But I, my dear Souvré, am even more weary than you."

He fell silent again.

Gontaut, Marigny, and every one around the Marquise was silent also. The quiet was absolute. Finally, the King said to the Commandeur:

"You are growing old, my dear Sir. I don't think you will last much longer. You should put your papers in order. Where do you want to be buried?"

When Louis XV was bored, all his thoughts took on sable hues.

"I must confess, Sire, that I think about it as little as possible," said Souvré surlily. "But the best place for me would be at Your Majesty's feet."

An eye for an eye. But to the bystanders it

seemed incredibly bold coming from a courtier to a monarch. However, the King was not angry. He sighed sadly:

"You are ungrateful, Souvré, you do not love me any more."

"I love Your Majesty when he is good-humored and does not speak of cemeteries. To-morrow, I hope to find him in better spirits. So I will ask him to accept my very humble homages and dismiss me until then."

"Go along, then. Good evening, my dear Com-mandeur."

In the meanwhile, Doctor Quesnay had gone over to the Marquise who was shaken by a fit of coughing. She clutched her hand to her breast.

"Something is burning me there," she murmured.

Quesnay took a comfit box out of the pocket of his ancient puce suit, and offered her a pastille.

"This will relieve you for the time being. But remember that you are playing with fire."

"I cannot help it," said the favorite, pointing to the King. "As long as he wants me, I will have to contrive to make the machine run. What does it matter? As long as I always have to dance to some one else's fiddling, what difference do a few minutes more or less make?"

Louis XV took Richelieu's arm with the intention of leaving for Versailles. The Marquise was calling down anathema on Choiseul's head. He had not come back.

"Good night, Mesdames," said Louis, without sin-

ON THE KING'S COUCH

gling out the Marquise as he usually did. "Messieurs, I bid you good night."

Madame de Pompadour and her friends bent over to the floor. The men bowed deeply. Just as the King, preceded by four lackeys bearing torches, was crossing the threshold, Choiseul and Sartine appeared at the other end of the room. Spurred by a desperate glance from the Marquise, the Prime Minister rushed after the King.

"Sire, Sire," said he in an urgent tone.

"What is it? Ah, it is you, Choiseul," said Louis turning around. "You seem out of breath. I was wondering where you had betaken yourself."

"Sire, I had gone to find Monsieur de Sartine. He has a very important report to show Your Majesty."

The King seemed to hesitate.

"Couldn't it wait until to-morrow? As you can see, I was already leaving."

"It is a serious matter, Sire. The King's personal glory is involved and, I might even go so far as to say, his security."

Choiseul was an excellent actor, and he had injected into his words a degree of agitation which was not lost on the King. He was naturally suspicious, and a mere nothing was enough to arouse his anxiety. He retraced his steps.

"What is it about, Monsieur?" he asked Sartine, whose long dark countenance had assumed a most sinister expression.

"As far as I can gather, Sire, it concerns nothing less than a kind of conspiracy against Your Majesty."

The royal countenance no longer expressed boredom. The royal eyelids fluttered.

"*Parbleu!* We must look into this immediately. Come into the Marquise's study here. We will be quite alone."

"Sire," said the Prime Minister, "it would be a good idea if Madame de Pompadour were to be present at this meeting."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes, Sire, I think it is necessary."

"Very well. She shall be present. And you, too, Maréchal," said the King, hanging on to Richelieu.

Choiseul made a face. The presence of this hostile element would be decidedly embarrassing. Louis had shown a certain princely malice, he thought. It was quite true. Louis XV was fond of teasing his ministers. That was what he termed "governing."

Madame de Pompadour's study was a long room adjoining the drawing-room. The walls were hung with admirable tapestries after sketches by d'Oudry showing the royal hunts. Chairs and a table occupied the center of this dignified room. When the favorite was at Bellevue, the various ministers came and consulted with her here every day. There were only two armchairs. The King took one; the Marquise the other. Then Choiseul and Richelieu sat down. Sartine remained standing.

"Sire," said the Police Lieutenant, taking courage from Choiseul's mien, "it is extremely painful for a faithful subject to mention this matter to Your Majesty. Nevertheless, I was forced to determine—"

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Come to the point, Monsieur."

"I shall obey, Sire. Your Majesty has shown favor to Mademoiselle de Romans, Baroness de Meilly—"

The King frowned.

"This person has a lover, a certain Venetian named Casanova. He directs all her actions, in the hope of obtaining the confidence of Your Majesty."

Louis XV struck the table angrily with his hand. He had become crimson. Richelieu was playing with his decorations. Choiseul maintained a dignified reserve. The Marquise stared at the floor. Their hearts failed them.

"What nonsense is this, Monsieur?" said the King in a loud voice. "When you accuse some one, you must have proof. Have you?"

"Here is the proof, Sire."

Sartine pulled a little notebook out of his pocket, and took some papers out of it.

"First of all, I have several letters from Casanova to Mademoiselle de Romans. The King will be edified to note that they indicate no uncertain degree of intimacy. The most recent one, which is dated about a month ago, ends with certain remarks which I greatly deplore having to show to Your Majesty."

"Let me see."

He glanced through the letters. His hand trembled slightly.

"It is true," he murmured.

Then he read over the last one. It was the same

one that Anne had kissed in such transports when the King had promised to legitimize her son.

"The memory of your beauty, the apparent beauty which the whole world knows, and the secret loveliness which I am privileged to know, never leaves me. I am constantly longing to see you. Why did I ever go away from you? I must have been out of my senses. . . . Unlike your old Sultan, I would need no potions and pills to prove my love to you. . . ."

"Your old Sultan," roared the King, his self-possession completely gone. "The wretch! That is the last straw! How dared he make fun of me? Who is this Casanova?"

"Sire," answered Sartine, "he is a high flown adventurer, his one interest in life is intrigue. He balks at no crime or dishonest action. He has three known deaths on his conscience. He has always led the most debauched life. He wins enormous sums by robbing people and cheating at cards and spends his gains on his fantastic orgies. He has almost brought about the ruin of the Marquise d'Urfé on the pretext of magical research. . . ."

"The Marquise d'Urfé?" interrupted the King. "That old woman, the Regent's friend?"

"Yes, Sire. I have a confession regarding that adventure from a poor creature named Passano. The Venetian wanted him to act as his accomplice. Nothing could show Your Majesty more clearly what a base character this Casanova is. If the King will

ON THE KING'S COUCH

allow me, I will read it to him, although some of the details are distasteful."

"Go on," said Louis XV who was by now thoroughly intrigued.

Choiseul and Madame de Pompadour breathed again. Sartine began:

"MY LORD:

Your Excellency has promised me his protection and ordered me to make him a faithful report concerning the infamous trick which the ruffian Casanova, self-styled magician, played on that very noble lady, Madame la Duchesse d'Urfé, in order to defraud her of her riches. I was not actually present, but I had all the details of his operations from Madame la Marquise herself, and also from Marcoline, a very talkative girl whom Casanova employed as a sort of acolyte in his sacrilegious enterprise.

It happened at Marseilles at the beginning of last year. Casanova arrived at the Hotel of the Thirteen Cantons where Madame d'Urfé had been awaiting his arrival for more than three weeks. I must admit that, being very short of money at the time, and having been put under a spell by that devil of a Chevalier, I had agreed to play my part in his travesty. I was to be a celestial spirit and assist in the rites of Madame's reincarnation. My duty was to render her well disposed by making love to her.

The lady was planning to make me magnificent presents. Casanova prevented her from giving them to me by telling her to enclose them in seven packages, each one destined for one of the seven planets. Each of these packages contained seven pounds of the metal which corresponds to the particular planet: gold, silver, copper, mercury, lead; and seven precious stones, each weighing

AT BELLEVUE

seven carats: diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, etc. He caused a box with seven compartments to be made.

Every day he spent several hours alone with Madame la Marquise while he consulted his familiar genie, who was called "Paralis." He would ask him how to carry on his operations, and each time, this oracle, due to the trickery of his strange calculations, would vouchsafe the answer he had planned.

In the meantime I had fallen ill, and had to keep to my bed. When Casanova saw my condition, he felt that all his schemes were jeopardized and heaped abuse upon me. I immediately taxed him with his impudent knavery and wrote a letter to Madame d'Urfé exposing the entire plot.

She was so enamored of this scoundrel, so blinded by his wild tricks and incantations that she would not believe a word of it. Casanova persuaded her that I had been enchanted by evil spirits and that since I had become so dangerous, "Paralis" had designated the Venetian himself to replace me in the ceremony of regeneration.

As he was not quite certain that the ceremony would be concluded satisfactorily in view of the fact that Madame la Marquise is over sixty years of age, and retains only a semblance of her former beauty, he pretended that a certain water sprite, a messenger from the moon, was a necessary adjunct to the performance. Marcoline, a pretty little Venetian girl, who was Casanova's mistress, played the part of the water sprite. He dressed her all in sea green: coat, trunks, shoes, and stockings.

On the eve of the day appointed for the reincarnation, Casanova took Madame d'Urfé to the seashore. After making a prayer to Selenis, he threw the box with the seven compartments into the sea as an offering to the spirits. Naturally, it held nothing but lead. The gold

ON THE KING'S COUCH

and silver and precious stones had been cleverly abstracted and hidden in Casanova's trunk.

The next day, he came to Madame la Marquise's room. By now he never addressed her except as Semiramis. He was dressed in a long black robe, embroidered with the signs of the Zodiac, and wore a tall golden headdress, a good deal like the one worn by the Doges. Madame d'Urfé, magnificently attired, and wearing all her jewels, watched him with undisguised admiration. The whole room, including the bed, was adorned with festive decorations, and in the middle of the floor stood a bath tub draped with garlands of flowers.

"Semiramis," said the impostor, "are you ready to participate in the ceremony which is to terminate in your rebirth as a beautiful young man?"

"I am ready, illustrious maestro," said the poor Marquise.

Casanova struck the floor three times with an ebony and ivory wand and the water sprite appeared.

Marcoline knelt before the Marquise, kissed her hand and presented her with a scroll of paper. The Marquise opened it. It was perfectly blank. Casanova consulted his oracle, who replied that all that was written in water could be read only in water.

Madame d'Urfé plunged the piece of paper into the bath and characters appeared. They read: "I am dumb but not deaf. I have come from the Rhône to bathe you. The hour of oromasis has begun."

Marcoline stripped her of all her gaudy attire, and one by one, her jewels disappeared into a roomy wallet which the water sprite wore at her belt.

Casanova anointed her forehead, her eyes, her ears and her mouth with a magic oil—as a matter of fact he had bought it that same morning at the grocer's. All these

AT BELLEVUE

rites were accompanied by cabalistic signs and an impressive ritual in gibberish.

Thereupon followed the bath and certain other ceremonies. I will spare your Worships the details of their indecencies. Suffice it to say that the rites were repeated at the hour of Astarte and once more in honor of the god Mercury. Marcoline assisted materially in this performance.

Finally Casanova persuaded the Marquise to drink from a crystal flask which he had brought. It must have contained a powerful narcotic, for she fell immediately into a deep sleep. Marcoline and the bogus magician left her lying on the bed and hastily absconded."

While this bizarre document was being read, the King's face had brightened little by little. He was soon laughing heartily at the farce which centered about the poor old Marquise. Richelieu following suit, appeared convulsed, but Choiseul and Madame de Pompadour did not have much heart for mirth.

"It certainly is fantastic," said the King. "I can picture that old fool in the hands of the two rogues. That fellow Casanova can't have enjoyed it very much.

"Go on," he said to Sartine.

"The next morning, the Marquis still slept. Casanova awakened her by burning some sort of incense or powder under her nose. He assured her that the apotheosis was successful and that after nine moons she would give birth to her other self, and her present body would then disappear. In order to spare himself, he ordered her to keep to her bed for one hundred and seven hours.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

Then they all went to Lyon to await the great event. I happened to be in Lyon myself, at the time. I learned of that rascal's arrival and decided to go to a lawyer and start a suit against him. He had robbed her of gold and jewels amounting to a hundred thousand pistoles by this time and had undoubtedly been giving me a slow poison, for my health had been completely shattered. He realized that his head was at stake, if I should accuse him before the just and all seeing magistrates of his most Christian Majesty of sorcery, forgery, theft, spying, and poisoning. He tried to buy me off with certain sums of money, and driven by poverty, I accepted. He then left for Paris.

Shortly after, I was advised by Your Excellency's agent, that Monseigneur wished to see my evidence, and I hastened to comply with Your Honor's distinguished request. I am at Milord's disposal if he should wish to hear this account from my own lips, provided that he deign to send me the money for the trip and pay certain debts that I was obliged to incur here.

I await Your Excellency's orders and beg to remain his very humble and devoted servant.

GIACOMO PASSANO."

Sartine placed this edifying document on the table, next to Casanova's letters. The King glanced at them.

"Is that the original report," he asked, "or a copy?"

"It is a copy. The original, which I have with me, is too garbled and ungrammatical to read."

Sartine had realized the necessity of arming himself with the original. Without it, Louis would never have believed him.

"Good. But who is this fellow, Passano?"

"A knave of sorts; a wretch who would not hesitate at anything," said Sartine quite frankly. "You can gather as much from his report. Just the same, he has not exaggerated, despite his hatred for Casanova. Passano is at present in the hospital at Troyes, and would not dare expose himself to the consequences of lying to Your Majesty's officers of justice. I took the added precaution of confirming his report. I spoke to the Comte de la Tour Auvergne, Madame d'Urfé's nephew. He introduced Casanova to his aunt, to his great regret. Thanks to the Venetian, the Marquise has parted company with most of her wealth. He absolutely confirms what Passano says."

"Is that sufficient?" asked the King. "Wouldn't it be better to interview Madame d'Urfé herself? Such rascally behavior ought to be severely punished. I trust that you intend to bring the rogue to trial."

"Unfortunately, Sire, Madame d'Urfé is now become quite mad. She has withdrawn to her estate in Auvergne and spends her time dabbling in alchemy. If she were to be implicated in this trial, it would serve only to cast ridicule and dishonor on one of the most illustrious names of France. Many of the members of that family have served Your Majesty exceedingly well."

"You are right, Sartine. But what should we do?"

"Sire," said the Duc de Choiseul, adopting the manner which he fondly believed was most suited to a Prime Minister, "Your Majesty is quite right

in saying that offenses of this nature should be severely punished."

"What do you propose?"

"First of all, an order signed by you, committing Casanova to the Bastille. I have one right here, if Your Majesty wishes to sign it."

"Give it to me, and I will sign it."

Madame de Pompadour arose quickly and placed a little lacquer desk before the King. He traced the five haughty letters that formed his name.

"Now, Sire," continued Choiseul, "we are faced by an important problem. What do you wish to do with Mademoiselle de Romans? Your Majesty cannot see her again," he added firmly.

The King was silent for a moment. Madame de Pompadour had almost fainted with excitement. She had fallen back against her chair, and was twisting the lace on her dress between nervous fingers.

"Do you really think, my dear Duc," he finally said, "that she deserves a severe punishment? She was probably led astray. She is very unworldly. Perhaps if she were thoroughly frightened, it would be enough of a lesson to her."

"Your Majesty has surely not forgotten the terms used in the Venetian fellow's letter. He and Mademoiselle de Romans were making a dupe of the King and insulting his dignity."

"My dignity—that is true."

Louis XV was not vindictive. His very egoism kept him from any violent feelings. He disliked the thought of making an irrevocable decision about

Anne. He was not lacking in cunning and understood the Marquise's maneuvers perfectly. Choiseul and Sartine were seizing this opportunity to crush the impudent upstart who had nearly brought them to grief. They were as thick as thieves. How could he sacrifice his darling, when one short hour before he had been determined to endow her with a princely fortune and destroy her enemies? She was certainly guilty. But she was so beautiful! She had been such a constant source of pleasure to him. She made him feel years younger. She satisfied him.

He sighed.

Madame de Pompadour understood his hesitation. She had studied every convolution of his cold vacillating brain. She decided to strike a telling blow.

"Monsieur," she said to Sartine, "I think it is time you informed His Majesty of a certain revolting detail of this affair. His well-being is at stake."

"What do you mean, Marquise?" asked Louis.

Sartine seemed embarrassed. He would never have chosen this weapon himself. Only a woman would have dared to bring up such an accusation. But the Marquise knew the King's exaggerated interest in the safety of his own person. It was a last resort, but almost certain of success.

Sartine leaned over and whispered something to Louis.

The King paled visibly.

"The wretch," he cried. "This is horrible. I must see Quesnay immediately."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Then, Sire," insisted Choiseul, "what has Your Majesty decided?"

"What would you do if you were in my place, Duc?"

The King had only one thing in mind; to put an end to this conference, and investigate Sartine's false accusations.

"I should ask Monsieur de Sartine to inform Mademoiselle de Romans that the man who was such an influence in her life was a scoundrel and that she need expect nothing further of the King."

But Louis said nervously:

"She will protest and complain and write me letters. She is so excitable. There will be tears and reproaches."

"You need not fear that, Sire," said Sartine. "In order to avoid the scandal, I can send Mademoiselle de Romans to some convent, where she can meditate and repent, without any means of communicating with Your Majesty."

"Yes, that is a good idea—"

But one other thing occurred to him.

"And the child?"

"He can be entrusted to responsible persons," said Madame de Pompadour. "They will bring him up fittingly."

"That seems very cruel," said Louis slowly. "Don't you think so, Maréchal?"

This was addressed to Richelieu, who had not said a word. The former Regency *roué* had decided that the hour was unfavorable to his schemes, but being

AT BELLEVUE

an experienced statesman, he felt that it was useless to struggle. His ancient rival, the Marquise, had outgeneraled him again. He merely replied:

"Your Majesty is right; it is very hard."

"Couldn't the child be left with his mother?" asked the King.

"There would always be the danger of further intrigues," said Choiseul shortly. "She would be continually trying to get back into Your Majesty's good graces."

"Well then," said the King, getting up, "do whatever you like. And please send Doctor Quesnay to me."

Shortly after, he returned smiling. Choiseul and the Marquise looked at each other significantly.

He was greatly relieved and consequently in excellent spirits.

"And now, my dear," he said, kissing the Marquise's hand, "we might seek some sort of amusement. This has all been so painful. I refused your supper once, but now I am hungry. I think I might relent."

Madame de Pompadour was in transports.

She beckoned to the Comtesse d'Amblimont and Madame d'Esparbes, Gontaut, the Marquise de Marigny and the Maréchale de Mirepoix, who stood at the other end of the room awaiting the end of the battle, under a pretense of animated conversation. They gathered from the King's attitude that she had been victorious.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Come," said the King. "Follow me, if you love me." He turned. "And you, too, Richelieu and Choiseul. Are you coming, doctor?"

"Sire," said the old man, nodding his heavy, be-wigged head, "I am very grateful to Your Majesty, but I do not recommend these diversions, and my age demands that I retire."

"For shame, doctor," said the Marquise gayly, "you are an old bear. You will go and ruin your eyes reading all night in your little den. You had better come with us. You are my prisoner. Maréchale, take his other arm, and don't let go. I hold you responsible, and your head is at stake."

Sartine was about to leave. The King stopped him and said in a low tone:

"Do not let the Venetian escape."

"I shall arrest him to-morrow morning. Your Majesty may depend on me."

"Very well. But, Sartine, be more gentle with the Baroness."

"Certainly, Sire."

"Come and report to me to-morrow evening."

The Police Lieutenant disappeared.

"And now, Mesdames," said Louis, "I am ready to do justice to the Marquise's feast."

He was about to offer Madame de Pompadour his hand, when she suddenly struck her forehead.

"I must be losing my mind," she said. "One moment, Sire, I have something I must say to you."

Looking very enigmatic, she dragged the King off to her apartment. They went in.

AT BELLEVUE

Madame du Hausset was standing in the boudoir holding a very young girl by the hand. She was as beautiful as a little angel, with soft blond curls tumbling over her slender shoulders, and the daintiest little figure in the world.

The King motioned her to approach.

He took her on his knee. She was not timid, and she smiled.

"Are you a good girl?" asked the King.

Louis held innocence in high esteem. He was satisfied she told the truth, and gave her a kiss. She began to laugh merrily.

"Why do you laugh, little rascal?"

"Because you look exactly like a six écu gold piece."

"Would you like to stay with me?"

"Oh, yes."

Louis arose, and thanked the Marquise with a glance.

"You have good taste, my dear," he said. "Come, little one. We will go to supper."

IV

SARTINE'S MISSION

SARTINE had finished reading her dismissal. Anne sat there with her eyes wide open, immobile and unseeing. She was overcome; her enemies had won. She would be sent away, her son would always be a bastard. All this was due to Casanova.

He had guided her every action for the last four years; his lying horoscope had sent her on the fatal trip to Paris and hurled her into the King's arms. When she had come into favor he had sought her out again; he had made a plaything of her, harnessing her to his desire for power and money. Left to herself, she would have been satisfied with the crumbs from the royal feast, but he had incited her to exorbitant demands. Ever since she had left Grenoble he had pursued her with his eager advances. Finally he had taken her unawares and overcome her resistance. She had been submissive; dazzled by his sorcery. She had been like a sleepwalker, but now she was awake, and saw that she was beaten. He was a vile diabolical gambler and he loved nothing in this world except his gambling. She was only one of those countless women he had used—one after another—all his life. By means of them he had made his living, presented a fine appearance, and

SARTINE'S MISSION

dazzled all his contemporaries. She had been just like all the others, one of his loaded dice, another way of adding to his fund of deviltries. She had loved him, but it had not mattered. His soul was callous and his heart cynical. His ardent declarations had been a farce. His only feeling for her was purely sensual. He had forgotten her as soon as this feeling had been satisfied. He had basely betrayed her at every turn: with Manon Baletti; with the Duchesse of Chartres, with prostitutes, with servants, with old Mme. d'Urfé; some for pleasure, some for gain. He was a ruffian—that was what Sartine had said and it fitted him. He was an abominable ruffian, and she had placed herself in the power of a man like that. He had shared in all her thoughts; on account of him she had lost her reputation and ruined her son's life. She was speechless with fury and disgust.

"All that remains for me to do, Madame," said M. de Sartine, "is to give you the King's instructions."

This would be her sentence. She bowed her head like a criminal on the scaffold.

"His Majesty requests that you return to him the letters that he has written you. One of them, I believe, is recent, and the other was written the day your child was born."

Anne looked at him fixedly without answering.

"Are those letters still in your possession, Madame?"

"Yes, Monsieur. I have them and I will keep them. I will never give them up."

"Kindly hand them over to me. The King wishes them to be returned."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"Monsieur, I will give them back to the King himself and to no one else. If he wants them, he must come and get them. I will never give them to you."

"You forget, Madame, that I am here in the King's name."

"We are wasting a great deal of time. I will not give you those letters. They bear witness to my son's origin, to the royal blood in his veins. They are his whole heritage. Some day they may clear his name. At least, they will be some protection. I intend to keep them for him. I warn you, if you attempt to take them away from me—if you attempt to steal them from me as you stole those other letters—you will not succeed."

Sartine did not move a muscle. "Do not fear any violence on my part, Madame, but the fact remains that His Majesty wishes to have those letters in his possession. As a matter of fact, they are not as important as you seem to think."

"Then why do they want to take them away from me? You say they are not important? Do you think that I am a fool? In that letter the King recognizes his son and his right to the name of Bourbon. His Majesty's councilors want to destroy the proof. Once they have the letters, all they will need to do is to destroy the birth certificate and my child will be nothing but a nameless bastard. I will not give you that satisfaction. I am resigned to my fate. I accept all sorts of indignities, but while I am alive, I will not let you have those letters."

She stood up. She looked tall in her flowered dress.

SARTINE'S MISSION

She was very pale, her eyes flashed. She took a step towards Sartine, who drew back and lowered his eyes.

"Pardon, Madame," said he in a more human voice. "I am fulfilling a painful duty."

"Painful? You have been working for my ruin for months. It was you who stole my papers. Yours is a pretty profession, Monsieur; I compliment you. It must be very profitable."

The Police Lieutenant's long, tired face looked more drawn. "The King's service, Madame," said he simply.

"It appears that there is much dishonor attached to the King's service."

"I beg you to remember, Madame, that you are speaking to your master's representative."

"Rather to the representative of my enemies, Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul and Madame de Pompadour, your patroness."

As a matter of fact, Sartine was following Choiseul's personal orders in this matter, and he dared not insist further. Her furious refusals had exhausted his patience.

"Very well, Madame. Keep the letters if you will. I doubt if they will be of very much use to you. I am afraid that you will be quite powerless. The King orders you to leave this house and retire to a convent."

"To a convent?"

"I myself will have the honor of escorting you to the convent of the Ursuline Sisters of St. Denis. As

ON THE KING'S COUCH

you probably know, it is under the direct supervision of the Crown."

"How long must I remain, Monsieur?"

"The King did not state definitely. It will depend on your submission and your repentance."

"My repentance? You forget yourself, Monsieur. Yesterday you would not have dared speak to me in this manner."

"Madame, I am repeating the King's words. This discussion is quite useless. Doubtless you have some preparations to make. My coach is downstairs. We are expected at St. Denis this evening."

"We cannot possibly go this evening. I must write to the King. I must see him and throw myself on his mercy."

"His Majesty would not receive your letters. Abandon any idea you may have of seeing him again."

"I understand. The Marquise is afraid. She has taken precautions. Very well. I will go and dress my son."

She was about to ring. Sartine stayed her with a gesture.

"You need not concern yourself about the child. He will be entrusted to certain persons who will care for him tenderly."

"What do you mean?" She had not the slightest notion of what he was saying.

"Your son," repeated Sartine in an embarrassed tone, "cannot be allowed to remain with you; at least not for some time."

SARTINE'S MISSION

"They are going to take him away from me? They dare? Do you know what I am going to do, Monsieur? I am going to leave here with him. We will go to my home in Grenoble. We will live there in concealment. No one will ever hear of us again. That is what I imagine Madame de Pompadour wants, but she could not insist on more than that. If she prefers, we will leave the kingdom. I will do everything she asks; I will even return the letters if she will leave me my child."

"It is quite impossible. You are to leave this house alone, under my care, and go to the convent."

She made a rush towards the door. Sartine forestalled her and barred the way.

"Quite useless, Madame. There is no use attempting to escape. All the exits are guarded by my men. As for your son, he has already left. I carried out my orders and had him sent with his nurse to a place where, I repeat, he will be very well brought up."

"They did not even let me kiss him good-by." Her pride was all gone. Tears streamed down her face. She clasped her hands. "Monsieur, if the King wishes to separate me from my child, he might at least let my sister go with Louis-Aimé. She is devoted to him."

Sartine shook his head. "Madame, His Majesty foresaw this request and denied it. Madame Varnier is a woman of doubtful morals. The King does not wish his son to be under her influence."

"She is the wife of a magistrate."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

"She left her husband and turned her house into a brothel. She is entirely given over to gambling and intrigue. She would do well to be extremely discreet in the future. She barely escaped Fort l'Evêque as it is." Then he added, "You have been the victim of bad companions, Madame. That fellow Casanova—he was her lover, too."

"I do not believe you, Monsieur."

Unfortunately, in spite of her courageous denial, she did believe him. It did not astonish her. Suddenly Sartine looked up.

"What are you doing, Madame?" he asked.

She was trying to wrench the necklace from her throat, but she was trembling so that her hands faltered.

"There, Monsieur," she said, "give the King his pearls back. I want no remembrance of him." And then she bowed her head between her hands. She stayed in that position for a while. Sartine saw her shoulders shaking.

"I await your pleasure, Madame," said the Lieutenant of Police.

She played the part of queen for the last time. She motioned toward the door. Sartine bowed low and went out.

Anne walked up and down the room with hurried steps. What should she do? She was alone and helpless and had no one to advise her. There was no way of communicating with the King. Even though she could by some miracle see him, she would not pos-

SARTINE'S MISSION

sibly be able to win him over. That cowardly monarch, whose pride she had hurt and whose peace of mind she had troubled! The sentence had been final. Her distracted gaze fell upon the ring which gleamed on her finger. She touched it. It was the emerald which Casanova had given her in Grenoble.

Casanova! What harm he had done her! Already her rage against the Chevalier had dwindled into bitter resentment. All her hatred was directed toward the Marquise and the King, who had taken her child away from her. At least Casanova was never cruel. He had been guilty of base actions, but now that she came to think of it, she felt that he had shown a certain amount of consideration for her. He did not love her—he was incapable of love—but he was her sincere friend. Probably he would not hesitate at any crime, but at the same time he was gracious and brave and generous. He was such a tactful rogue, so thoughtful. He had been unfaithful to her a hundred times, but then that was his philosophy. He had a fiery nature, and he did all sorts of foolhardy things to satisfy it. At heart he meant well. She knew he was attached to her, not disinterestedly perhaps, but impostor that he was, he had not always lied. Sometimes he had looked at her so tenderly that she could still feel the warmth of his glance. It had cost her very dear, but she had loved him.

She had loved him since that time in Grenoble when she had so gayly disdained the future greatness and luxury that the false prophet had foretold

ON THE KING'S COUCH

and offered to give it all up for him. She had loved him; for when she came to Paris her one secret thought had been to see him again. She had loved him even when she had refused to give in to his supplications, keeping her favors for the King. Afterwards she had surely loved him, in spite of his absences, his silences, and all the mystery that surrounded his debauched existence.

She belonged to a different race. She could see it now. She was a little French bourgeoisie who became the harem favorite by a dizzy stroke of luck. Casanova was the very spirit of adventure, a bold bird of prey. His pleasures were keen but transient. He was a splendid but deceptive lover. Their lives had crossed only by chance; they had remained strangers. She intuitively knew that no matter what happened—although she might never see him again—all her youth and her dreams would be bound up in his memory.

For her high spirits had fallen. Her fate had passed out of her hands. She no longer had her child. All she could do was to love him from afar without being able to defend him. Only one thought occurred to her exhausted mind—to warn the Chevalier. Perhaps there was still time for him to escape.

The convent awaited her, but it might be death itself that menaced Casanova. He was a magician and a blasphemer, and the King's justice would be pitiless. After months of torture, bruised and broken, he would be dragged to the scaffold; his poor limbs would writhe in the flames which are the

SARTINE'S MISSION

lot of sorcerers. Then the Marquise's vengeance would be complete. Poor Chevalier! His gay, light-hearted crimes would end in a frightful expiation.

There was very little that she could do: only write him. She could not rejoin him. Who could tell where he was? At home, perhaps, or at Madame Varnier's, or at the Maréchal de Richelieu's house. The police must have been searching for him everywhere, provided he had not already been caught. Could she entrust a letter to one of her servants? To which one? Several of her lackeys must be in Sartine's pay. There was only one possibility left—to write a note and address it to Casanova in care of Richelieu, then to slip it into an envelope with a golden louis and drop it out of the coach on the way. Some beggar or water-carrier or street-arab might pick it up and give it to the Chevalier. It was a slender chance, an ephemeral resource, not likely to succeed. She might not even be able to lean out of the window, but at least she could try. Were she to die for it herself, she would try to save Casanova.

On the alert for footsteps, she hastily wrote:

To M. le Chevalier de Seingalt;

*In care of M. le Maréchal de Richelieu, at his house
on the Rue Saint-Honoré;*

Fly, Chevalier; I implore you. Your life is in danger. Above all do not attempt to see me again. Do not worry about me; I can bear my trials. Nothing would lighten them more than to know that you are safe. Farewell.

A.

She thrust the note into her bosom, then ringing the bell for her maid, she hastily changed her dress, threw a black lace scarf over her head, stuffed a few personal things into a bag, took her remaining money and the few little souvenirs of her girlhood, her mother's wedding ring and Louis-Aimé's little silver rattle. She found a miniature of the King, but left it behind.

She dismissed her servant and then emptied her drawers and burnt all her papers. She walked about the room, looked at the walls, the furniture. Through the window gleamed the garden, white with frost. Night was falling. There were the narrow, patterned walks, the little summer house, and the frozen fountain with the little bronze triton blowing on his conch shell.

She was seized by a kind of giddiness. She leaned her forehead against the glass for a moment and the cold revived her. She called her lackey.

"Tell Monsieur de Sartine I am ready."

He appeared in the door. She pointed to her one piece of luggage.

"I am ready, Monsieur. We can go."

At one glance he saw the open inkwell on the desk. "You have been writing, Madame," said the Lieutenant of Police. "That is not allowed. You will bring down more stringent punishment upon yourself, but if there is anything I can do for you, let me know; I am entirely at your service."

She did not answer. Her pride would not allow her to lie to him. He followed her out of the room.

V

THE FAREWELL

It was still daylight. The slender crescent of the moon peeped over the cloister. A path crossed the little grassy enclosure. Ancient apple trees lined it on either side. Everything was peaceful and silent, only the rustling of the leaves, the chirping of the katydids, and the tinkle of a bell. A white figure was seated on a bench in the middle of the convent garden, near the great slab of stone which bore dim traces of a sun-dial. She had not moved for quite a while. Gentle footsteps drew near. She did not seem to hear them.

"Madame," said a nun, touching her discreetly on the shoulder.

Mademoiselle de Romans raised her head. "Forgive me, sister. I was dreaming."

"Some one is at the gate and asks to see you for a few moments, Madame. A priest."

"A priest? It is so late. Did he give you his name?"

"Monsieur l'Abbé de Murano."

Anne thought for a moment; then she motioned indifferently: "I do not know him. Tell him to come back to-morrow, sister. I am tired."

The nun left.

ON THE KING'S COUCH

Anne had been in retirement at the Ursuline convent for a year and a half. Little by little her bonds had been loosened. Lately she had been allowed to receive a few visitors. They were few and far between, anyhow. Her disgrace had driven away her friends. Madame Varnier came only from time to time. But every week Sartine sent a messenger with news of Louis-Aimé. In spite of Anne's prayers, her child had never been returned to her.

The nun was coming back again. "Monsieur l'Abbé insists on seeing you now, Madame. He cannot come back to-morrow. He says he has a message from Monsieur le Maréchal de Richelieu, a very important message. Perhaps out of respect to his cloth Madame might—"

Anne repressed her astonishment and said in a calm voice, "Go and get him, sister. I will receive him."

L'Abbé de Murano—Murano—that was near Venice—supposing it were Casanova!

It was.

She saw him coming down the path. He was walking behind the nun, dressed in sober black. But he wore his little cape over his shoulder like a cavalier. He had not changed: his bright hawk-like eyes gleamed in his pale face; his mouth was still as red and smiling, his walk as swaggering.

Anne's heart beat noisily. She made an effort and stood up, but she was incapable of saying a word; her face was paler than her dress. The abbé bowed low before her and said in a respectful tone:

"Madame, I implore you to forgive my indiscre-

THE FAREWELL

tion. Monsieur le Maréchal de Richelieu, my reverend protector, ordered me to speak to you immediately. The matter is pressing and cannot brook delay."

"Certainly, Monsieur," she murmured. "And thank you for your solicitude. You may leave us, sister," she said to the nun.

Casanova stood before Anne and his glance swept her from head to foot. She had certainly changed. She was as beautiful as ever, and as majestic, in her long simple gown. She was dressed in some coarse silken stuff, the color of old ivory, without lace or embroidery. But although the marble perfection of her features had not altered, there was something touching in her whole face, even in her attitude—a certain submission and gentleness, a kind of secret melancholy—which rendered her even more feminine and more charming than she had been. Before her misfortune she had sometimes lacked grace, she had been too stiff. She had been refined by suffering.

"Are we alone?" he asked in a low voice. "Can I speak to you quite openly?"

"Yes, the nuns are all at evening prayer. No one can see us. But aren't you running great risks by returning to Paris?"

He smiled that astounding smile which made him look so young. "This disguise has protected me from the eyes of the curious. I have been in Paris for a week. I am in hiding at Richelieu's house; he is still friendly towards me. They have forgotten us, Anne,

ON THE KING'S COUCH

but I haven't forgotten you; I could not, even though I had wanted to."

He dropped down on one knee. Anne sighed; a vision rose to her memory of the garden at Grenoble the night of the ball. He had knelt at her feet then. So much had happened since that far-off evening.

"Dear Anne," said Casanova in a voice that she did not recognize. No one had ever heard him speak in that tone; his voice was deep and clear. "Anne, will you ever forgive me?"

"What have I to forgive, Chevalier?"

"You are here on account of me. I was the cause of your losing the King and your son. I have often thought of it and often regretted it. I have done you a great wrong."

"Perhaps," she said slowly and painfully, "if it had not been for your horoscope, I would never have seen the King; my child would never have been born. I owe you as much as you owe me—perhaps more. Get up, my dear. I forgave you a long time ago."

He raised her hand to his lips, then he rose lightly to his feet.

"You see, Chevalier," she said, "I have thought things over a great deal—I have nothing else to do. I have recalled the events that affected my whole life. We both made mistakes, but destiny was the chief culprit. We were betrayed by destiny. At first I was bitter towards you, I must admit; I blamed you. Then I understood almost at once."

"You are very generous, Anne, and you received

THE FAREWELL

such a cruel blow. I have my liberty, thanks to you."

She seemed pleased. "So you received my letter?"

"Yes, the very evening that Sartine brought you here. I was in hiding; the Maréchal warned me at dawn that my arrest had been decided on in his presence. He implored me to leave the country, but I could not do it without first seeing you."

"But you were risking your life."

With a gesture that was natural to him, he carelessly flicked his jabot. It was certainly far too elegant for a mere priest.

"I have risked my life many a time for women not worth your little finger, and I have fared none the worse. Only your note could have made me decide to leave. I left Paris dressed as a servant and I took the road for Strasbourg—sometimes on foot, sometimes by coach. After many humorous and tragic incidents I reached the frontier. There I received news of you from the Maréchal, who has always taken a great deal of interest in you. He hated the Marquise so thoroughly. I would have tried to write you or Madame Varnier, but the mails were being watched. I was afraid that I would only make things harder for you. Only oblivion could save you, so I consigned you to oblivion. But, Anne, what have you been doing? How you must have suffered!"

"I was unhappy, especially at first. The catastrophe came so suddenly. I have been sick—I had a fever for a long time. I could not accustom my-

self to the idea of being separated from Louis-Aimé. In spite of his orders I wrote to the King several times—angry letters and lacking in respect, I am afraid. He merely let me know that the child was well. I saw no one but the nuns. They were good to me, very good. They taught me resignation; I learned to pray. Some months passed. Madame de Pompadour died.”

“Ah,” said Casanova in a peculiar tone, “have you learned the exact circumstances of her death? I have heard contradictory reports. Some people thought it very peculiar.”

Anne shrugged her shoulders. “I know only the report that is going around Paris. She was seized with cramps and spat blood. Nothing seemed to help her. She became very emaciated and barely able to stand on her feet. She spent several hours every day painting her face and preparing for the King’s visit. By force of habit he continued to call on her until the very end. She died as she would have wished—the favorite in the palace at Versailles, although none but the royal family is allowed to die there. She kept up her courage till the last. She had pretended—out of respect to the conventions, I am convinced—to make her peace with God. After he had heard her confession, the priest was about to leave. She called him and said with her customary hauteur: ‘Just a moment, Abbé. We will leave together.’ And he did not dare depart until she sank back lifeless.”

THE FAREWELL

Anne spoke of her rival without acerbity. It all seemed so far away to her.

"But wasn't there a rumor," insisted Casanova, "that she was poisoned?"

She looked at him in astonishment. "No, I don't think so. Perhaps there was, but the doctor said her death was natural."

"That was his business," said Casanova ironically. "Has your sister said nothing to you, Anne?"

"At that time she was not allowed to visit me, not until later. Probably she spoke of it, but I don't remember. Why do you ask me?"

He did not answer. A sudden thought crossed Anne's mind. "Have you seen Madeleine again?" she asked.

"No, and I don't intend to."

"My dear, you may rest assured that I am not jealous any longer."

"There is no question of jealousy, Anne," said Casanova gravely. "I have been the source of great grief to you, my poor child, but your sister was your real evil genius. Avoid her in the future. She is dangerous. She is capable of terrible things."

Anne understood. She was horrified. "The Marquise?" she asked. "That is horrible, Chevalier."

"Not so loud," he murmured, casting a hasty glance about him. "I am not certain, Anne. I would not want to accuse her. The Marquise had been sick for months, and perhaps I should not have mentioned it. You are so loyal, so trusting, you know so little about life."

ON THE KING'S COUCH

She shook her head. "I know more now."

He was silent.

Anne was lost in reverie and she fingered her dress mechanically. Distorted images flashed across her mind. She started when Casanova spoke again.

"I have news for you, Anne, good news. Richelieu, who is still in high favor, spoke to the King about you yesterday—and don't get too excited, my dear—"

"Tell me, Chevalier. I cannot stand it."

"The King has granted that Louis-Aimé be returned to you."

She rose brusquely and stretched out her arms. Her head whirled. Casanova caught her just as she was about to fall. She started to cry. "My child," she stammered. "At last I shall see him."

He did not interrupt her. Richelieu had requested this favor at his urgent insistence. The old roué had at first been scornful. "Why on earth are you interested in that brat?" "Not the brat," Casanova had answered, "but the mother." Richelieu had laughed.

Anne laid her hand on the Chevalier's arm. "When will I see him?"

"To-morrow, I think. Lebel will bring him to you."

She took a deep breath and merely said: "Thank you."

The bell rang.

"That is the end of evening prayer," said Anne.

THE FAREWELL

"The nuns will soon be out; you must leave. Listen, Chevalier, I have a plan." The words tumbled from her lips. She was in the grip of a kind of exaltation. Casanova waited immobile. "Do you remember that evening at Grenoble when you wanted to run away with me?"

"I remember."

"Perhaps I was wrong not to consent. My life might have been different. I am willing to do now what I refused to consider then. They let me go out on little errands now. When Louis-Aimé comes I could escape with him on some pretext or other. You could wait for me in a carriage near here. We could leave together for a foreign country. Will you do it?"

"No, Anne," he said gently. "No, I won't do it."

She was stupefied. Then all her former violence returned.

"I am a fool. I should have known you never loved me."

"Dear Anne, I loved you and still love you. You are the only woman that ever really meant anything to me. Of all the adventures I have had, the most unusual and the most beautiful was with you. Of all my loves you are the one I cared for most sincerely. Anne, the word may sound strange from my lips, but I am quite truthful when I say my feeling for you was the purest. I do not want to feel any regret; I reject the great joy you are offering me because you would pay for it too dearly. I could not consent to drag you into further misfortunes. For

ON THE KING'S COUCH

your own sake and for the sake of your child you should stay here. It won't be for long; the king has already begun to unbend. In time your friends will succeed in softening his heart. The return of Louis-Aimé is but a step towards your restoration to favor. Be patient. Who knows but what you may return to Court?"

She smiled deprecatingly. "I would not wish it."

"For Louis-Aimé?"

"For Louis-Aimé," she repeated undecidedly.

"You are young, my dear. Stay in France and start your life over again. You may still be happy. As for me, I am an adventurer and I shall set forth on further adventures. I have no other future, no other aim, no other hope. My life is more than half over. My hair is already turning gray. I could not possibly alter my life. Have no regrets, Anne. I am not worth the life you are offering me, a comfortable home and calm enjoyment. I will always be a vagabond, but wherever I am, think of me kindly not sadly, and be assured that although you may not hear from me for a long time, in my heart I will always be faithful to you."

Casanova's usually sparkling eyes were covered with a thin mist. Anne felt the tenderness in his tone. She realized that he meant what he said and she took his hand and pressed it in hers. Then she leaned over and kissed him on the forehead as though he were an older brother.

The sound of footsteps broke the silence. The Ursuline sisters appeared on the walk, two by two,

THE FAREWELL

their heads bound in the coifs with the great white wings, their hands crossed over their rosaries. The bell rang once again. Casanova stood up.

"Farewell, Anne."

Anxiously she asked, "Shall I see you again?"

"No, I am leaving for Germany to-morrow. Then I will go to Russia and see Catherine the Great. I will be away over a year, even longer, perhaps."

"But when you come back to France, I will surely see you again?"

He hesitated and then, to spare her grief, murmured, "I promise you."

The nun who had ushered him in was coming towards them. Casanova became the Court Abbé once more. He bowed with easy nonchalance. Anne dismissed him with a light nod; her knees were trembling. If she had spoken she would have burst into tears.

He went off. As he was about to leave the cloister he could not help turning around. Anne was seated on the bench, white against the moonlight, her face hidden in her hands. She raised her head just then and their eyes met for the last time. Then he went his way.

NOTE. *Mademoiselle de Romans left the convent of St. Denis near the end of the year 1770, and in 1772, with the King's permission, married the Marquis de Siran-Cavanac, an officer in the Dragoons. Louis-Aimé de Bourbon, her son, took holy orders at the express wish of Louis XV. Madame Louise and*

ON THE KING'S COUCH

Madame Adelaide, the King's daughters, were much interested in his future and planned a great career in the Church for him. He was sent to Rome to complete his education under the Cardinal de Bernis and died there of the smallpox in 1787, when he was hardly twenty-five. The Marquise de Cavanac became a widow and emigrated to Spain at the time of the Revolution, then returned to France during the Consulate. She had lost her fortune and lived modestly at Versailles, where she had so many memories. She died there December 27, 1808, beautiful even in her old age, but completely forgotten and almost in want.

THE END

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